



Edited by André Loiselle  
and Tom McSorley

*Self.  
Portraits*  
With a Preface by Piers Handling

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# *Self Portraits*

**THE CINEMAS OF CANADA SINCE TELEFILM**

Edited by  
**André Loiselle & Tom McSorley**

With a preface by  
**Piers Handling**

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## PREFACE

**Piers Handling**  
**Toronto International Film Festival**

In the mid-seventies a French publisher approached Pierre Véronneau and Cinémathèque québécoise to produce an introductory text on Canadian cinema. Twelve writers were commissioned from across the country to write on key aspects of our film history. Two years later I edited, and the Canadian Film Institute published, an English translation of *Les cinémas canadiens*. Two new articles were added and one was dropped (at the request of the author).

We were forced to change the name of the book for its English translation, sadly in my eyes. Cinémathèque québécoise had come under withering criticism from its Board of Directors for publishing a book with a title that both dared mention Canada in its title and which also implied that there was indeed something called a Canadian cinema, even if the title was slightly more ambiguous than that. But, in 1980, Quebec could not be subsumed into Canada. And, thus *Self Portrait* was born.

As Peter Urquhart points out in one of the essays in this volume, we had no idea in 1980 what changes lay just around the corner. Whether we knew it or not, we had

chosen to publish at a key moment. Hitherto, the Canadian cinema had had a checkered past. After a series of starts and stops, a feature film industry had lurched into being in the early sixties, almost despite itself. Fueled by the anything-is-possible mantra of the sixties, interesting films started to appear. Quebec filmmakers emerged from the deep sleep of the Duplessis years stimulated by the province's nationalist sentiments. Toronto and Vancouver stirred and shrugged off years of lethargy.

When *Self Portrait* appeared the Canadian Film Development Corporation that sustained the feature film dream was just 13 years old. Quebec was the only province that had a film agency designed to finance and support the sector. The nascent film coop movement was struggling to find its feet. It was early days.

1980 fell in the middle of a very divisive period in our film history. The CFDC began to radically shift its priorities. After a decade of supporting auteur-style films, few of which had done well commercially, it was decided that a more significant return on investment was required. Commerce would be privileged over art, the producer over the director - and the Capital Cost Allowance made its (disastrous) appearance as a funding mechanism.

Something was nipped in the bud, and in reality, a generation of filmmakers simply stopped making features between 1977 and 1984 (Arcand, Forcier, Pearson, Darcus), radically altered their production practice (Carle, Beaudin, Jutra, Shebib, Spry, Kent, Fruet), or disappeared into the margins (Lefebvre, Owen).

*Self Portrait* was published against this backdrop. And, if commentators have, accurately, pointed out that the articles of the time were more like pieces of advocacy - "hortatory," "prescriptive" and "moralistic" (Dorland) - they were. We felt there was something to be defended



that was being threatened, and much of the critical writing of the period was designed as an intervention.

Now here we are, a quarter of a century later, with a new volume of writings. What has changed? Certainly, the critical writing has evolved, becoming more sophisticated, rigorous and analytical. Cultural theory has made enormous strides, providing a theoretical framework within which to approach cultural products. Film theory has been replaced by postmodernist theories that mine questions of race, gender and ethnicity. Bazin/Heath/ *Screen* has given way to Jameson, Wiens and Shields.

The writing about place yields much of great value in this volume. The binary oppositions of centre/margin, hinterland/heartland, urban/rural, national/transnational provide points of access that tease out understanding and reveal complex patterns at work. Traditional clichés (the prairies) are here replaced by contemporary reality (Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba), as Christine Ramsay notes (although, curiously, the Maritimes do not receive the same treatment!).

As an organizational mode, approaching the messy, heterogeneous, promiscuous assemblage (to paraphrase David McIntosh) of Canadian cinema by way of the provinces/regions seems to me as appropriate as any other in 2005. It certainly gives the reader an effective snapshot of the state of the filmic nation. It is, after all, the way that the country is organized politically, regionalization and an increasing devolution of federal power to the provinces being a reality of the last quarter of the last century. (Sadly overlooked in this volume is a region that has produced a landmark film of our cinema, the Nunavut region responsible for the remarkable *Atanarjuat*; as well as the aboriginal cinema of Obomsawim, Cardinal and others.)

But I was also struck, reading the essays, how little the debate had changed. The central issue, raised by many of the writers, is the dynamic between art and commerce that has informed so much of both the practice of Canadian cinema in the last decade, as well as the policies that underlie that practice.

After the disastrous interlude of the CCA years, there followed 15 years semi-golden years. If the years 1963/65 (*Le chat dans le sac*, *Nobody Waved Good-bye*, *Winter Kept us Warm*, *The Bitter Ash*, *La vie heureuse de Leopold Z.*) to 1978 saw the birth of our modern cinema, the period from 1984 to 2000 was a moment of regeneration. In those 15 years the Toronto New Wave rose to prominence, Quebec rediscovered its voice, British Columbia forcefully began producing distinctive work, Manitoba tickled our funny bone, and production in Alberta and the Maritimes began to simmer with flashes of imagination.

A distinctive Canadian cinema: esoteric, diverse, and multifaceted, began to travel overseas, often through festivals. Our cinema appeared to have found a voice that was as powerful as our literature. Cronenberg, Arcand, Egoyan and Maddin stood shoulder-to-shoulder with Atwood, Ondaatje, Martel and Richards.

In hindsight, 2000 may be as important to our film history as 1978. That was the year that Sheila Copps set Canadian cinema a target of occupying 5% of our domestic market. A modest goal to be sure but it would have seismic repercussions. The art-commerce debate returned with a vengeance.

To be fair public policy in the mid-nineties prepared the ground. The introduction of the tax credit system was an economic, not a cultural, initiative. Its effectiveness was measured solely in terms of economic activity, and certainly Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver benefited enor-

mously. It stimulated production, much of it American “runaways”, but people were working. Copps’s announcement, which Telefilm turned into its policy mantra, inevitably privileged the commercial over the cultural.

So here we are in 2005, and is the view out the window much different than it was in 1980? Quebec, alone of all the provinces, has an industry that makes films that are seen by audiences in a significant way. We are still writing about “an invisible cinema” as Peter Harcourt described it. Even Cronenberg (curiously under represented in this collection) and Egoyan’s films are only seen by a small percentage of the population. They are celebrated in film festivals, and then viewed by a select few in urban centres. As Brenda Longfellow points out, these two are better known outside this country, which explains not just the sources of their financing, but also the distinctive anonymity of the films themselves.

The outspoken resistance of many English-Canadian filmmakers to the 5% target led to a stand-off. Filmmakers heckling bureaucrats, and bureaucrats dismissing the films that are being produced, has not led to good cinema. Yet, Quebec shines by being the exception. The only lesson that can be taken away from this, I think, is linguistic. Quebec films appeal to a relatively homogenous culture that shares a common language and culture and that wants to see itself. Ironically, this limits the appeal of their production internationally – a fact not lost on filmmakers like Arcand and producers like Frappier and Robert.

On the other hand, English-Canada is caught in a double-bind. We do not have the resources to compete with Hollywood on their terms as the market demands – here, the fact of the shared language is a curse. Conversely, those Anglos who do have the Midas touch of the popular find themselves in LA very early in their career. The pat-

tern is ominous: Jewison, Furie, Kotcheff from the 50/60s generation, Reitman from the 70s, Cameron, Haggis, more recently. And, these are only the directors! Add in the acting and writing talent and we can see what an immense drain we have suffered.

History is repeating itself, as these essays perhaps unwittingly suggest. In 1980, the only chapter on a commercial industry dealt with Quebec. Twenty-five years later, Quebec finds itself with two chapters on its commercial cinema. The rest of the writing celebrates with intelligence and critical perception, films that virtually no Canadians have seen. When you occupy even 5% of the market, you are to all intents and purposes, invisible. A self-portrait that has no viewer is like a painting turned to the wall. It exists, but will it ever take its rightful place, hung and lit for all to see, appreciate, enjoy and study?

Toronto, December 2005

## CHAPTER 1

### Introduction

**André Loisel and Tom McSorley**

In 1980, the Canadian Film Institute published *Self Portrait*,<sup>1</sup> edited by Pierre Véronneau and Piers Handling. In his preface to this anthology, largely based on the French-language book *Les Cinémas canadiens*<sup>2</sup> edited by Véronneau two years earlier, Piers Handling asks whether Canadian cinema does in fact draw “a collective portrait that we recognize” or if it remains an “invisible cinema” that Canadians never see.<sup>3</sup> Twenty-five years later, our sequel to *Self Portrait* tries to provide an answer to Handling’s rhetorical question by pluralizing the original title: *Self Portraits*.

Contemporary Canadian cinema paints a wide range of “self portraits” in which some Canadians may see some images that they recognize as their own. Spectators adopt various identities along lines of ethnicity, gender, language, sexual orientation, age, class, physical or psychological conditions, political allegiances etc. and Canadian films have evolved with their audiences. The cinemas of Canada that have emerged since the publication of *Self*

*Portrait* are significantly different from those that composed the canon in 1980. The documentary style has certainly lost its influence on fiction film, as has European art cinema. With films as diverse as Pierre Falardeau's *Elvis Gratton, le film* (1985), Deepa Metha's *Bollywood/ Hollywood* (2002), Noam Gonick's *Hey Happy!* (2001), Cynthia Scott's *The Company of Strangers* (1990) and Robert Morin's *Le Nèg'* (2002), the home-grown production of the past twenty years has broadened its appeal to some of these identities. But no movie, no matter how trendy and all-inclusive, can claim to brush a single collective self-portrait in which we *all* recognize ourselves. If the original *Self Portrait* imagined the face of Canada as a black and white documentary picture of a fair-skinned actress, the changes that this country and its cinemas have experienced since the 1980s demand that our sequel problematize this image of who we are.

In its title, the original French-language anthology already acknowledged the diversity of Canadian cinemas. But the diversity assumed by the editors of *Les Cinémas canadiens* and *Self Portrait* was primarily regional rather than ethnic, sexual or political. Regionalism, which was paradigmatic of Canadian studies at the time the two books were published,<sup>4</sup> clearly informs Véronneau's introduction to both versions. "One of the objectives of this anthology", he explains, was to "survey the evolution of the cinema in Canada from 1898 to the present. We soon discovered that it never focused on one particular area. A region can be a flourishing centre and then lapse into inactivity; another which is vibrant in 1920 will have to wait another fifty years before it sees a return to its former state of activity, etc. It is impossible to grasp the cinema in Canada: it disappears in one area, crops up in another, moves from west to east, splits up, dies, is reborn, etc."<sup>5</sup> In his preface,

Handling similarly acknowledged that the history of Canadian cinema has been “marked by regional differences.”<sup>6</sup> For *Self Portraits*, a book that elects to focus on fiction feature films<sup>7</sup> produced since Telefilm replaced the Canadian Film Development Corp. (CFDC) as the main federal funding agency in 1984, a regional conception of the cinemas of Canada still offers the best structuring principal. This is in part because, in spite of the wide range of identities one can adopt, regional sentiments remain central in most Canadians’ perception of who they are. “Certainly for the vast majority of the country’s citizens,” wrote Beverly Rasporich in 1997, “regional politics and local cultures play essential roles in determining their allegiances, and their sense of self.”<sup>8</sup> The affective, memorial, and cultural dimensions associated with a given region, what members of the *Situationniste* movement used to call the “psychogeography of space,”<sup>9</sup> continue to be major determinants in one’s behaviour and definition of one’s self as an active agent in the appropriation and construction of a certain milieu (would it be a city, a province or any territory perceived as a unified whole).

In terms more specifically related to film culture in Canada, the funding policies of the past twenty years, both at the federal and provincial levels, have tended to reinforce regional patterns of production in fiction feature filmmaking. The National Film Board, which had been at the heart of film production in Canada well into the 1970s, lost much of its influence in the 1980s and ‘90s. While it now seems to be in the process of reclaiming some of its former glory, from the early 1980s to the early 2000s, it decidedly took a secondary role in the production of films in this country. From the shutting down of its regional distribution outlets, starting in 1985,<sup>10</sup> to the elimination of Studio D in 1996,<sup>11</sup> the NFB became a mere shadow of its

former self and, in the process, significantly diminished the importance of documentary in Canadian film culture. At the same time, however, agencies devoted to the funding of fiction feature films increased both their financial contributions to the production of commercial movies and their regional profiles. The year of its creation, Telefilm opened two "regional offices," in Halifax and Vancouver, to complement the Montreal and Toronto offices operating since the days of the CFDC. Furthermore, in the 1980s most provincial governments established their own film funding agencies thus creating official regionalism, as it were. In fact, the 1984 proposal to set up provincial funding programs in Manitoba was explicitly motivated by the fact that federal agencies like the CFDC and the CBC had failed to recognize the province as a creative and independent *region*.<sup>12</sup>

As early as 1977, Quebec already had its funding agency, the Institut québécois du cinéma,<sup>13</sup> which has often been re-christened and is now Société de développement des entreprises culturelles (SODEC). By the 1980s, other provinces followed suit. The Alberta Motion Picture Development Corp. (now the Alberta Film Development Program) was established in 1981.<sup>14</sup> The Ontario Film Development Corp. (now the Ontario Media Development Corporation) was formed in 1986.<sup>15</sup> The following year, the Film Development Society of British Columbia (better-known as B.C. Film) was set up,<sup>16</sup> and the Manitoba Cultural Industries Development Office (now Manitoba Film and Sound) started promoting films in that province. The Saskatchewan Film Development Corp. was incorporated in 1989, and in the 1990s Nova Scotia<sup>17</sup> and Newfoundland & Labrador<sup>18</sup> gave themselves film development corps as well. All this means that since the 1980s, provincial policies have started playing an important role in determining



the sort of films that are produced or *not* produced on their territory. This can potentially lead to an increase sense of place and history in films emerging from a given region, but can also create petty rivalries amongst regions competing for limited production opportunities. Denys Arcand's *Love and human remains* (1993) is a telling example of both the limitations of this official regionalism and the consequences of ignoring the local character of a story.

Based on Brad Fraser's play *Unidentified Human Remains and the True Nature of Love* (1989), which is set in Edmonton, the film was supposed to be shot in Alberta but the AMPDC refused to fund the film because "the production simply had too great a Quebec orientation."<sup>19</sup> Arcand had to shoot the film in Montréal and, in the process, emptied the original text of many of its region-specific qualities, such as the main character's nightly "sexcapades" in the creepy woods of Victoria Park. This most powerful moment in the play disappears completely in a film that deracinates the drama from the environment that created it and thus becomes little more than a failed generic thriller about serial killings in an anonymous city. Of course regionalism, when it comes to film and other cultural practices, cannot be understood simply in terms of where the work is produced. A genuine regional voice always expresses a commitment to the place whence it speaks. It is unlikely that even if Arcand's *Love and Human Remains* had been shot in Edmonton it could have been wholeheartedly conceived of as an "Alberta film." The director's sensibility being thoroughly Québécois, something in the film would have remained *alien* to the location. For Harry Hiller, regionalism "is something that is lived and part of daily life which in a real sense becomes part of who a person is as an individual and provides a view or perspective on the world outside."<sup>20</sup> As well-

travelled and internationally known as Arcand may be, he will always remain a guy from Quebec, the same way as David Cronenberg, for instance, will always remain a Torontonians.

The flip side of this argument, however, is that as much as film is a cultural artefact that can be rooted in certain ideological traditions, social structures, demographic make-up and geographical determinants, it is also a heavy industry that is subject to the availability of capital and resources and has perhaps less to do with personal or regional needs for self-expression than with the exigencies of global markets. The articles in *Self Portraits* seek to account for both cinema's complexion as an art form rooted in the realities of a time and a place, and film as a big business that ultimately depends on one thing and one thing only: cash! And in Canada, a good portion of this cash has been coming from governmental funding agencies, especially Telefilm. Part I of this collection, which focuses on the Art-versus-Commerce dichotomy, opens with Peter Urquhart's chapter on the transformation of the CFDC into Telefilm. As he sets the historical stage for the filmmaking practices that have developed over the last twenty years, Urquhart does not blindly reject the tax-shelter boom era that preceded the creation of Telefilm in 1984. Rather, he identifies a continuum of policies that have been borne out of the constant struggle between culture and industry.

André Loiselle picks up on Urquhart's point that "there remains a stubborn divide in the discourse surrounding the Canadian cinema between art and commerce," to argue that this dichotomy has determined the critical construction of "Quebec cinema" in English Canada. As eager as Canadian critics have been to embrace films from Quebec, especially since the success of Ar-

cand's *Le Déclin de l'empire américain* in 1986, they have tended to focus exclusively on art films and ignore completely commercial movies. This has resulted, Loisel argues, in the invention of the largely imaginary region of "English Canada's Quebec," which overlaps only in part with the actual geo-political region known as *Québec*. In his piece on the commercial success of genre films in that province, Pierre Véronneau further discusses the viewing practices of actual Quebec spectators, who differ notably from English Canada's imaginary Québécois. In fact, as Véronneau points out, a favourable prejudice towards art films and *auteur* cinema has not only determined the way English Canadian critics have perceived Quebec films but also how French Canadian scholars have studied their own cinema. By looking at the genre films that Quebec spectators flock to see in theatres, he wishes to "counter-balance traditional histories of Quebec cinema that say as much through the films they ignore as through the works and filmmakers they choose to celebrate." Véronneau's attempt to counteract "the limitations imposed by a prescriptive critical and historical discourse that seeks to define what Quebec cinema *should* be, in spite of the reality of the industry" conveys an attitude shared by most contributors to this anthology who recognize that, while the *auteur*-centred approach typical of the 1960s and 70s still has a place in the critical discourse, it must be complemented by a consideration of the political and economic apparatuses that surround the film industry.

Continuing the debate around the Art-versus-Commerce dialectic, Diane Burgess examines how the two sides of the dichotomy have, paradoxically, enriched one another in the British Columbia film industry to create a uniquely West Coast conception of trans/national cinema. For her, it is in great part thanks to the influence of Hol-

lywood runaway productions in B.C. that a new “community focussed on narrative feature filmmaking has evolved to overtake strong regional traditions in experimental film, animation and documentary.” Unlike most historians of Canadian cinema, Burgess avoids the Manichean separation between good independent, local films and bad made-in-Canada Hollywood movies. Rather she identifies a generation of local filmmakers who have learned from the American presence in the province and have become adept at negotiating the art-and-commerce dichotomy. Throughout her chapter, she uses the term “Pacific New Wave” to describe this new generation of feature filmmakers, but she closes her argument by suggesting that this New Wave might be more accurately named the *Vancouver* New Wave for, as much as B.C. films have tended to include locations from all corners of the province—from the suburb of Surrey in Bruce Spangler’s *Protection* (2000), to the pristine Penticton of Sandy Wilson’s *My American Cousin* (1985) and the isolated Trail of John Pozer’s *The Grocer’s Wife* (1991)—most recent films focus on the dark side of Vancouver. As such, Burgess suggests, the regionalism of B.C. films is, in fact, intra-provincial, more specifically, metropolitan.

This is certainly the case for cinema in Ontario, where regional identity, as presented through feature films, is thoroughly Torontonionian. At once the centre of film production in Canada and a mere branch-plant of Hollywood, Toronto presents a peculiar example of the struggle between art and industry. Torn between the promises of a distinctive New Wave of art cinema initiated in 1987 and the centrifugal pressures of globalization, which constantly threaten to eclipse whatever distinct character it might have, Toronto has become a paradoxically unique example of the post-national generic metro-

polis. Brenda Longfellow argues that it is precisely the erasure of local distinctiveness that makes Toronto New Wave filmmakers distinctive: "From the very first then, the orientation of New Wave films was internationalist both in the manner in which the films implicitly address an international art cinema audience, and also in the way in which they are devoid of any explicit referencing of a national allegorical tradition [...] What replaces a sense of national distinction in the Toronto New Wave is a kind of metropolitan cosmopolitanism". In other words, the iconography of urban placelessness is as uniquely representative of the Toronto region as images of wheat fields blowing in the wind and grain elevators are of Saskatchewan.

But, in fact, as Christine Ramsay suggests in her chapter on Saskatchewan, "the icon of the grain elevator is making way for new images on the horizon." These are images of the "New West" which have gained and continue to gain "purchase in Western consciousness in the last two decades." For Ramsay the art-versus-commerce dichotomy present in larger production centres like Vancouver, Montreal and Toronto, translates into the "dual issues of aesthetics and regionalism" in Saskatchewan. As such, her piece gives the tone to Part 2 of *Self Portraits*, on Regional Aesthetics, which explores the emergence of certain filmmaking styles and practices determined by "cultural systems of space," to quote Rob Shields. Focusing primarily on production activities in Regina, Ramsay examines the debate that pits filmmakers who identify themselves "with forms of collectivization that have [...] to do with valuing the specificities of place, regional cultural expression, and local community identities" against producers who eke out "a half-life imitating tired trends from somebody else's 'centre'." The argument around a

certain type of films made in Saskatchewan, therefore, has less to do with the evils of capitalism – after all, everybody wants to earn a decent living – than with mindless replications of stylistic and narrative clichés that hinder attempts to develop “‘place-images’ that are charged with emotional content, mythical meanings, community symbolism, and historical significance.” Some films produced since the mid-1980s, like Gerald Saul and Brian Stockton’s *Wheat Soup* (1987) and Robin Schlaht’s *Solitude* (2000), have managed to escape clichés and stereotypes to speak of Saskatchewan “as a diverse and *socially constituted space*.”

Brenda Austin-Smith similarly argues that several Manitoba filmmakers have succeeded over the last twenty years to escape the stereotypes of “prairie realism” as they have produced “works of psychological rather than physical regionalism.” Even traditional, realist films like Aaron Kim Johnston’s *The Last Winter* (1990) have a “touch of the mystical” in them. More representative of recent Manitoba films than *The Last Winter*, however, are those productions that have emerged from the Winnipeg Film Group and that ignore realism altogether in favour of “experimental anachronism.” Such experiments in anachronistic narratives have resulted in works where “the historical and local details of life in Manitoba inevitably form a lexicon for local filmmakers, but one often used in the narration of stories in which it is impossible to name the setting with precision.” This creative displacement of a regional lexicon, she adds, “resists the often tortured determination of reviewers and critics to see in it some essential, specific quality of ‘prairie-ness’ or Canadian character, insisting instead on its relation not to nationality, but to a genealogy of filmic images.” Guy Maddin stands as the best ex-

ample of this challenging, idiosyncratic practice and, as such, his *oeuvre* is at the core of Austin-Smith's piece.

While Maddin is the best-known filmmaker to have emerged from the prairies, Bill MacGillivray is at the centre of film production in the Atlantic Provinces. Tom McSorley argues that "MacGillivray's work offers the most sustained and complex cinematic expression of the region and a simultaneous interrogation of the very concept of region itself in Canadian cultural discourse." Along with Michael Jones of Newfoundland, Tony Larder of New Brunswick and a few others, MacGillivray creates a cinema that asserts the presence of the region against all odds. The filmmakers of Atlantic Canada, concludes McSorley, "do not concern themselves with absence; they are engaged in a process of illuminating the cinematic possibilities of their own astonishing presence."

We close our anthology with Jerry White's article on Alberta filmmaking. Using the case of Alberta as a sort of synthesis of our entire collection makes sense for, as White argues, "filmmaking in Alberta has actually evolved in ways that echo important cinematic trends in 1990s and 2000s Canadian cinema, in terms of form, thematic concerns, and institutional issues. Alberta, long at the fringes of our cinematic imagination, is actually quite a microcosm for Canadian cinema of the last twenty years of the millennium." Alberta is perhaps to Canada what Canada is to the world, concludes White: "a prosperous region, envied by many for its wealth, but one that remains culturally marginal, if not entirely irrelevant."

In the end, each chapter of this anthology reflects the ethos of the region it examines. While Véronneau is inclined to talk about genres because Quebec has developed its own "system" complete with scintillating success stories, soaring stars and spicy scandals, Burgess is princi-

pally intrigued by issues of provincial funding, for B.C.'s industry revolves more around a constant competition with Ontario for the title of the "True Hollywood North" strong but certainly not free, than around actual success at the box office. While Longfellow is immersed in the discourse of globalization, for Toronto epitomizes the generic, post-national metropolis of the 1990s/early 21<sup>st</sup> century, Ramsay emphasizes the importance of place, roots and identity because Saskatchewan is characterized by a population torn between the practical need to move to the big centres and a deeply-felt attachment to the one place they can call home.

We believe that this is an appropriate time to publish *Self Portraits*. First, of course, it allows us to celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the original anthology. But it also comes at a moment that favours reflection on the past achievements of regional film industries in this country. The '80s and '90s represent something of a golden age in Canadian cinema, with a succession of films that enjoyed critical and sometimes even financial success at home and abroad. This golden age, however, now seems to have come to an end, at least in English Canada if not in Quebec. Indeed, Longfellow sees 1998 as marking the end of the Toronto New Wave. Since the late-1990s, perhaps starting with the publication of Geoff Pevere and Greig Dymond's *Mondo Canuck* (1996), English Canada seems to have given up on a home-grown Canadian cinema and to have become blissfully satisfied with celebrating the achievements of Canadians in Hollywood.<sup>21</sup> Looking back from our vintage point, Don McKellar's apocalyptic *Last Night*, released in '98, now comes across not so much as a symptom of *fin-de-siècle* angst than as a requiem for a remarkable era in Canadian cinema.



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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Pierre Véronneau and Piers Handling eds. *Self Portrait: Essays on the Canadian and Quebec Cinemas*. Ottawa: Canadian Film Institute, 1980.

<sup>2</sup> Pierre Véronneau ed. *Les Cinémas canadiens*. Montréal: Cinémathèque québécoise; Paris: Lhermier, 1978.

<sup>3</sup> Handling, "Preface," *Self Portrait*, vii-viii.

<sup>4</sup> See for instance, George Woodcock's *The Meeting of Time and Space: Regionalism in Canadian Literature*, (Edmonton: NeWest Institute for Western Canadian Studies, 1981) published a year after *Self Portrait*.

<sup>5</sup> Pierre Véronneau, "Introduction," *Self Portrait*, xii-xiii

<sup>6</sup> Handling, viii.

<sup>7</sup> One could argue against our choice to focus on fiction feature films on the basis that animation, experimental film and the documentary are more genuinely Canadian practices than feature filmmaking. Perhaps. But we consider feature filmmaking a practice that is more *representative* of the "Canadian paradox" than any of those three other modes of production. Cheap, small-scale practices, animation, documentary and experimental work are ideal for smaller countries like, say, Lithuania (which does have a strong documentary tradition). But Canada is not Lithuania, and its main filmmaking traditions *should not* be just documentary, experimental and animation. As one of the middle economic powers, closer in both population and GNP to France, Britain and Italy than any of these three is to the US or Japan, Canada *should* be a relatively important player on the international scene and *should* have a home-grown feature fiction film industry comparable to its mid-sized European counterparts. But on both accounts, Canada falls short. Canada is probably the most irrelevant of the world's important countries; the most marginal of the world's central countries; the weakest of the world's powerful countries. And it has the most disappointing of the world's most promising fiction feature film industries. The constant struggle of the Canadian feature film industry, we believe, is a reflection, or a symptom, of Canada's constant struggle for recognition as the important nation it *should be* ... but *isn't*. The paradox of the Canadian film industry, which *should be* important but *isn't*, is nothing less, we believe, than a perfect synecdoche of the Canadian condition.

<sup>8</sup> Beverly Rasporich, "Regional Identities: Introduction," *A Passion for Identity*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, eds David Taras and Beverly Rasporich (Toronto: ITP Nelson, 1997) 321.

<sup>9</sup> See, for instance, Marc Vachon, "Espace psychogéographique," *L'Arpenteur de la ville: L'utopie urbaine situationniste et Patrick Straram* (Montreal: Les Éditions Triptyque, 2003) 211-220.

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- <sup>10</sup> See, for instance, "NFB to Close office," *The Ottawa Citizen*, 19 Oct. 1985, C16, and "NFB closing Calgary Offices," *Globe and Mail*, 17 March 1986, E9
- <sup>11</sup> Kathryn Greenaway, "NFB cuts 170 jobs here, 10 elsewhere," *The Gazette*, 19 Mar 1996, A1.
- <sup>12</sup> Wanda Jamieson-Harrington and Carol-Anne O'Brien, *Executive Summary: A Report of Film and Video Production, Distribution and Exhibition in Manitoba and Recommendations for a Manitoba Government Policy*. Winnipeg: Research and Planning, Manitoba Culture, Heritage and Recreation, 1984.
- <sup>13</sup> "L'Institut québécois du cinéma," *Cinéma Québec* 6.6 (1978): 31.
- <sup>14</sup> "Alberta government finances corp. for film development aid," *Cinema Canada* no.88 (Sept. 1982): 3, 9.
- <sup>15</sup> Gail Henley, "Wayne Clarkson's risky business: Ontario feature filmmaking takes the OFDC challenge," *Cinema Canada* no 128 (March 1986): 16-19.
- <sup>16</sup> "BC Film tailored to BC needs," *Cinema Canada* no 147 (Dec. 1987): 37, 55.
- <sup>17</sup> See the Nova Scotia Film Development Corp. website: [www.film.ns.ca](http://www.film.ns.ca)
- <sup>18</sup> Noreen Golfman, "Imagining Region: A Survey of Newfoundland Film," *North of Everything: English Canadian Cinema since 1980*, William Beard and Jerry White eds. (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2002) 47.
- <sup>19</sup> Miro Cernetig, "Film agency decision decried: Alberta denies grant to Ar-cand project," *Globe and Mail*, 25 Aug. 1992, A8.
- <sup>20</sup> Harry H. Hiller, *Canadian Society: A Macro Analysis*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Toronto: Prentice Hall, 2000) 130.
- <sup>21</sup> Television shows like *Entertainment Tonight - Canada* attest to this increasingly widespread perception of English-Canadian culture exclusively in terms of the success of individual Canadians in the United States.

## **Part 1**

### **Art versus Commerce**



## CHAPTER 2

### **Film History/Film Policy: From the Canadian Film Development Corp. to Telefilm Canada**

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The period in which the books that inspired this one were published—*Les Cinémas canadiens* in 1978 and *Self Portrait* in 1980—was one in which enormous changes were taking place in the Canadian film culture, coincident as it was with the tax-shelter boom and formative as it was for the subsequent major film policy changes that followed in its wake.<sup>1</sup> Rich and useful though these books were upon their original appearance, one is struck today how they do not, indeed cannot (because of their historical proximity to the sea-change that was underway), even hint at the enormity of the transformation which was shortly to crash onto the beach of the Canadian cinema. Pierre Pageau's invaluable essay in the original books, "A Survey of the Commercial Cinema: 1963-1977," charts the now-familiar hiccupping of a minor national cinema, which burps out a few features here, a few there, inters-

persed with periods of near-silence and, when they arrive, even the then emergent first flurry of films produced with the benefit of the Capital Cost Allowance is read by Pageau, not as promising, but as indicative of a national sell-out to Hollywood. This account of the tax-shelter boom period has in the intervening years become a taken-for-granted assumption about the period, and one which, I have argued elsewhere, obscures more than it reveals.<sup>2</sup> Pageau concluded his chapter in the original *Self Portrait* by observing that if it did nothing else, his article demonstrates “the fact that many films have been made here,”<sup>3</sup> a comment which given the activity it documents and the explosion of production which did immediately follow the article's original appearance, seems modest if not slight in its self-estimation.

As well, at least as important for the radical changes in Canadian film policy and, arguably, for the Canadian film culture at large, was the reorganization of the CFDC into a body called Telefilm Canada in February of 1984. What follows will present an account of these enormous transformations in the national film culture as well as a consideration of the more recent events in this history, particularly the creation of the Broadcast Fund in 1983, the Feature Film Fund in 1986, the Distribution Fund in 1988, and the “From Script To Screen” plan of 2000, the repercussions of which are still being debated.

In addition to tracing out the narrative of feature film policy in Canada, I will also seek to point out alternative readings of the efficacy of state policy in the feature film sector different from than those which are found in much of the literature on the subject. Specifically, the apparently “scandalous” sell-out to Hollywood almost always presumed by accounts of the tax-shelter boom period (which resulted from the Capital Cost Allowance), is

one moment in this policy history, which requires, I argue, significant reconsideration. Indeed, much of the discussion of Canadian film policy has been and continues to a significant degree to be premised on an imagined (and in important ways, debatable) split between art and commerce—a battle between (valuable and necessary) cultural policy and (crass) industrial/economic policy—and my discussion of the shifts in Canadian film policy and their subsequent effects on actual production seeks to interrogate some of the consequences of this faulty premise for the formation and evaluation of state film policy.

### **Some “Back Story”: Towards a Feature Film Industry**

Michael Dorland reports that at the second meeting of the Interdepartmental Committee on the Possible Development of Feature Film in Canada, on January 21, 1964, an important initial matter was decided when, “‘the consensus was that the film industry should be primarily economic with ancillary cultural effects,’ though the committee noted that the cultural effects ‘might be quite important.’”<sup>4</sup> As well, this committee’s initial report also spoke directly to the shifts in international cinema towards art house production then prevalent:

The conclusion may be drawn that the diversification of the feature film industry into new types of production [...] now afforded possibilities for two types of Canadian-made production: the kind of film which receives good distribution in the art houses of Europe and the U.S., and the fairly low budget second features in a double-bill program, which could be made here as well.<sup>5</sup>

The committee, in other words, endorsed both industrial and cultural feature film policy options, tacitly acknowledging that the art house cinema was commercially successful, making contributions to national economies, on its own terms, while also recognizing, even drawing attention to, the market niche of schlock, or in the committee's words, "low budget second features." While the vagaries of cinema exhibition in the late 1960s and early 1970s rendered the double bill defunct for the most part, the market for such fare by no means disappeared, recovering strongly, in fact, in the period which this chapter is most concerned with, the years since the early 1980s (when many of the tax-shelter boom movies entered the marketplace), with the rapid rise of videotape distribution, and the new broadcast avenues for feature films provided by the then-emerging pay-TV systems. In the present day, and for the past decade at least, it has been recognized that so-called ancillary markets for feature films, including broadcast on network and cable television, and in the videotape/DVD markets, have actually been more important, and increasingly so, for a feature film's "bottom line" than have box-office receipts in theatres.

The government's participation in the feature film industry became concrete with Bill C-204, an Act to Provide for the Establishment of the Canadian Film Development Corporation, which, though passed in March 1967, did not result in any active assistance to the industry until 1969, with investments in such Canadian classics as Jules Bricken's *Explosion* (1969) and Morley Markson's *The Tragic Diary of Zero the Fool* (1969).<sup>6</sup> The idea behind the CFDC was that the primary obstacle to the establishment of a private feature film industry was the availability of capital, and the new agency sought to ameliorate that problem. Their initial policy objective was, in the words



of their first annual report, “to foster and promote a feature film industry in Canada” which they attempted to do by providing seed capital in the form of loans to producers.<sup>7</sup> Beginning with an endowment of 10 million dollars, the agency was conceived of as an industrial bank which would lend capital to producers, who would, in turn provide the agency a return on their investment when the films turned a profit. This removed the first stumbling block to the creation of a feature film industry—a paucity of capital—and the agency would maintain an ever-available pool of funds, replenished regularly by repayment and returns from profitable films. However, because the agency recouped so little, by 1971 its original ten million dollars had been spent, and in November of that year, the CFDC received from cabinet an appropriation of its second ten million dollars which came with a request for a clarification of the agency's investment strategies and goals. This request presumably came as a result of nearly simultaneous, if somewhat contradictory, occurrences, namely the failure of the agency's investments overall, on the one hand, and on the other, the scandalous success of Claude Fournier's *Deux femmes en or* (1970). This notorious success in which the two golden women of the title sexually service the various callers to their home caused shocked indignation in the House of Commons and among the general public (though largely Ontarians, it was reported) when it was revealed that it had been produced with the participation of the CFDC.<sup>8</sup> The federal government, it was felt, had no business helping finance the production of such soft-core pornography. One Member of Parliament complained of “words that vilely sully the beliefs of a majority of Canadians.”<sup>9</sup> What is most interesting about this moment in the history of state intervention in the film industry, for my purposes, is that the

“maple-syrup porn” case (there were other films of this ilk, besides *Deux femmes en or*, which Loisel labels “films de fesses” in the next chapter) shows how when the purely economic goals of state film policy are clearly successful—Fournier's film was the biggest commercial success in Quebec film history until Denys Arcand's 1986 *Le Déclin de l'empire américain*, which was itself displaced by other smash hits such as Robert Ménard's *Cruising Bar* (1989), *Les Boys* (Saia, 1997) and *Séraphin: un homme et son peche* (Binamé, 2002)—the “cultural value” argument still trumps this goal in the public and political discourse.<sup>10</sup> Clearly, this is a vexing, if not *the* vexing, problem of Canadian film policy in the period considered by this chapter.

Part of the explanation for the culture vs. industry tug-of-war within the CFDC as an institution has had to do with the fact that under the legislation which created the CFDC, parliament granted the authority to decide what exactly constituted a “Canadian feature film” to the CFDC itself. The CFDC's criteria for adjudicating “Canadianness” has been based upon a formula concerning the number of Canadian citizens in important creative roles, the percentage of the budget paid to Canadian firms, and a provision stipulating the Canadian incorporation of the production company. Slightly different rules applied for international co-productions.

### **The Government Begins to Create an Industry**

At a talk before a screening which kicked off the 2001 Cinémathèque québécoise's Paul Almond retrospective, Almond began with an amusing anecdote about how his film *The Act of the Heart* (1970) came to be one of the very first in which the CFDC invested funds:

Michael Spencer called me up and said that he'd heard Geneviève [Bujold] and I were starting another movie in Montreal, and that he was heading this new feature film funding agency, and that it wanted to invest in the picture. I said: "No. Mike, Universal is already behind us 100 per cent, the funding's all in place." There was a long pause, and then I said, "Well, I guess I can call up Lew Wasserman in Hollywood and see if they'll cut you in."<sup>11</sup>

This anecdote is funny because, to reiterate, the goal of the CFDC was to tackle the problem of initial capital which was seen by the government to be the primary inhibiting factor in the creation of a feature film industry. Almond, though, didn't need their money to get his film off the ground, itself an irony since the film is a rather obtuse, arty, narrative piece that ends with an act of self-immolation by Bujold's character. In other words, *Act of the Heart* is exactly the kind of movie that is usually associated with Canadian feature film production, and yet was one which for unknown reasons a major Hollywood studio felt was worth gambling on.

This anecdote is also useful for demonstrating how the divide between the apparently commercially-calculated and the apparently personal vision of auteur art films so typical of the usual conception of the Canadian cinema is a false one. A bankable director like Almond managed to secure financing from a Hollywood studio not because they thought he was a brilliant artist, or because he was speaking to the Canadian experience, but because they estimated their investment might generate a profit, exactly the criteria used to weigh participation in any

other project, be it *Porky's* (1983, Bob Clark) or *The Red Violin* (1998, François Girard).

While other policy option could have been adopted toward the creation of a feature films in Canada, via the already existing NFB or Canada Council, for example, parliament decided that an industrial bank model was more appropriate than any of the other options available. This choice has had broad-reaching repercussions since one of the most commonly cited problems with the feature film industry in Canada has at least as much to do with distribution as it has with production, and since the CFDC as it was established had no impact or even attempted impact upon the distribution sector. This very fact, from the moment of the adoption of this model of state participation, is arguably one of the root causes of the various sorts of market failures observed by analysts of the Canadian feature film industry, one which obscures, for example, the degree to which the Capital Cost Allowance was simply one aspect of an already existing (and still, to this day, persistent) policy instrument with such a flawed starting point. This is to say that a feature film policy which did engage with the problem of distribution (and exhibition), through, perhaps a quota, might have resulted in a radically different Canadian cinema than the one we presently find in existence, but also to say that Capital Cost Allowance period should not be seen as having caused this already existing (and still persistent) problem – the failure of many Canadian feature films to make it to screen for any period of time.

### **The CFDC's New Direction: 1978**

As S. Daniel Lyon and Michael Trebilcock observe, “most of the corporation's ‘investments’ were, in effect,

'grants' since the films in which it invested had a negligible chance of returning their investments. Between 1969 and 1978, its annual revenues from equity investments never exceeded 20 percent of its total film investments."<sup>12</sup> The relative failure of this system of investment as is evidenced by such meagre returns was the primary motivation for the change in strategy which the new regime of Michael McCabe (the CFDC's new executive director) brought to the agency. Beginning in 1978, the CFDC began offering bridge financing to producers both as a way of providing the earliest (and usually most difficult to acquire) capital, and also in order to demonstrate to other potential stake holders such as investment firms, brokerage houses and banks, that the government was committed to the successful creation of this industry with the hope that this display of confidence might encourage them to invest in the industry as well.

One element of the CFDC's new strategy that began in 1978, and which is almost totally overlooked by the extant account of the tax shelter boom, is the fact that the agency, in addition to supplying bridge-financing to projects, also restricted their equity investments in films (the formerly preferred policy instrument) to those with "100 percent Canadian entrepreneurial, creative and technical content."<sup>13</sup> According to Lyon and Trebilcock's study, the shift from mostly equity investment to mostly interim-financier "has resulted in greater availability of funds from the CFDC's operating budget for investment in these high-risk but ostensibly culturally significant films."<sup>14</sup> This was because the percentage of the CFDC's financial participation in feature films, in budgetary terms, fell from 37.5 percent in 1968 to 15 percent between 1975-78, because of the massive influx of private capital into the industry caused by the 100 percent tax write-off. It is there-

fore possible for policy analysts to argue, as Lyon and Treblilcock do above, that the tax-shelter boom in fact provided more and not less support for “culturally significant films” than had been the case before the tax-shelter boom. In any case, since the very notions of “cultural significance” and “Canadian theme” are so difficult to quantify with anything resembling precision, these concepts remain flawed as criteria for evaluating the national cinema, useless as they are as measurements of anything. To demonstrate just how subjective such ideas are, consider Manjunath Pendakur’s Table 14, entitled “Certified English-Language Feature Films, 1979.”<sup>15</sup> The chart divides the films into various categories, but he only puts two titles, *Surfacing* (1980, Claude Jutra), and *Suzanne* (Robin Spry, 1980), under the heading “Canadian theme.” This category, he explains, is for films with “Canadian subject matter or other significant Canadian cultural content.” He further explains that, “some films not listed under this heading have Canadian settings that are identified as such,”<sup>16</sup> which implies that for him an identifiable Canadian setting alone is not “significant cultural content.” If one were to agree with Pendakur’s criteria, then one could accept that he rules out *Tulips* (1980, Stan Ferris), the Gabe Kaplan/Bernadette Peters romantic comedy which dotes over and makes much of its Montreal setting. But it remains extremely difficult to understand how Pendakur justifies excluding several other titles from his Canadian theme category. For example, Larry Kent’s *This Time Forever* (1980, also known as *Yesterday*<sup>17</sup>) is about a French-English couple in Montreal in winter. Hockey is a significant feature of the narrative as is the McGill University setting. I would suggest that of all the tax-shelter boom movies, this one has one of the most direct claims on “Canadian theme,” but it doesn’t count to Pendakur. Similar

arguments could be made for the “Canadian theme” of other films such as Almond’s *Final Assignment* (1980) in which Geneviève Bujold plays a Canadian investigative journalist.

Pendakur’s book provides another excellent example of the difficulty posed by such a subjective idea as “Canadian theme” in his discussion of the domination of the distribution sector by American firms. Claiming *The Silent Partner* (1978, Daryl Duke) is an imitation of a Hollywood film that “could have been made anywhere in the world”<sup>18</sup> seems highly debatable given the centrality that Toronto’s Eaton Centre shopping mall has to the film, in all its highly, and recognizable, Canadian glory.<sup>19</sup> All of this is not so much to argue that the tax-shelter boom films are actually much more Canadian-seeming in character than the critics of the period allow, but rather that the very evaluative premise behind such discourse is fundamentally flawed.

### **Major Transformations: the Early 1980s**

As Ted Magder notes, “in policy terms at least, 1980-1984 was a very busy period,” and later that, “as the federal government prepared its new policy forays, the film industry itself was undergoing a significant restructuring process.”<sup>20</sup> This “significant restructuring” was a result of the fact that a large number of the tax-shelter boom films had been produced by neophytes (indeed, anyone with the gall to call themselves one was a “producer”) and were failed commercial ventures. This fact led to a crisis in investor confidence by 1980, with those looking for a tax-shelter investment much more reluctant to gamble on the highly risky feature film sector in the face of so many failed investments from the late 1970s. As

well, these events gave rise to the formation of a new body, The Association of Movie Production Companies, comprised of the largest most established firms in the national industry, and designed not only to deny membership to those fly-by-night operators who seemed to only be interested in the movie business as a tax-evasion tactic but also to take advantage of the good relationship established Canadian producers had created with American distributors during the tax-shelter boom.<sup>21</sup> This organization and its goals, Magder argues, lead to a retrenchment of the tendencies of the tax-shelter boom productions, insofar as successful producers such as Harold Greenberg and others did create more of those so-called “American-style” films which were associated with the tax-shelter boom, and did so quite successfully.<sup>22</sup>

The early 1980s also saw the release of a number of important lower-budget films in the *auteur* tradition, a trend which Magder calls a re-emergent one, returning to the tendency of pre-tax-shelter boom era disaster. Pointing to a small handful of titles, Magder argues that the appearance in the early 1980s of films such as Francis Mankiewicz's *Les bons débarras* (1980) and Phillip Borsos's *The Grey Fox* (1982) demonstrates a turn away from the apparently less personal films of the height of the tax-shelter boom, but this account fails to acknowledge the numerous, and perhaps even *more* numerous Canadian films of the tax-shelter boom which clearly exhibit a “personal style” and speak to directly Canadian thematic material.<sup>23</sup> In any case, even the appearance or perception of a return to more nationally-specific cinema in the early 1980s is interesting since this is certainly the period in which the re-emergence of the *auteur* cinema associated with the “heroic period” of the Canadian cinema (the mid-



late 1980s, which this chapter will cover shortly) was nascent.

Turning now to the matter of state policy during the “very busy” period of the 1980s, several significant events should be noted. First, in August 1980 the federal government announced the formation of what amounted to the first major examination of cultural policy since the Massey Commission Report of 1951. And when the Report of the Federal Cultural Policy Review Committee (known as the Applebaum-Hébert Report, after the committee's co-chairs Louis Applebaum and Jacques Hébert) was published in 1982, the findings, while arguably controversial, had little obvious direct influence upon feature film policy in Canada. However, as Ira Wagman notes, with the 1982 release of the *Report of the Federal Cultural Policy Review Committee* “government policy toward the cultural realm began to emphasize the marketing and distribution of Canadian cultural products both domestically and in the international marketplace.”<sup>24</sup> As well, as Wagman and others point out, the Applebaum-Hébert Report is certainly significant inasmuch as it signals a departure from the cultural nationalism of previous state cultural policy documents such as the Fowler and Massey Commission Reports of 1957 and 1951 respectively.<sup>25</sup> Instead, the Applebaum-Hébert Report suggests cultural policy is important not because nefarious Americanization is a threat to Canadian cultural sovereignty, but rather because increasing the market-share of Canadian cultural industries was both economically and culturally desirable, acknowledging the market orientation of the global cultural industries, and suggesting ways for Canadian participants in these industries to participate more fully in them.

It will not be surprising, then, given this inclination toward favouring widening private participation in cul-

tural industries and expanding market share, that the Applebaum-Hébert report recommended continuing the Capital Cost Allowance program (the policy which had resulted, largely, in the tax-shelter boom), as well as suggesting that,

The Canadian Film Development Corporation should have its role and budget substantially enlarged so that it may take bolder initiatives in financing Canadian film and video productions on the basis of their cultural value and professional quality.<sup>26</sup>

In addition to suggesting this enlarged role for the CFDC (and, infamously, suggesting that the National Film Board of Canada had outlived its usefulness as a producer of films), the Report pointed toward the increasing (or simply an increasing recognition of) the convergences of various media in the film and television industries, suggesting that government policy should seek to see these industries and the policies which support them “as a package,” a recommendation clearly achieved by the transformation of the CFDC into Telefilm Canada which followed the report.<sup>27</sup>

Another of the huge transformations in the Canadian film culture of the early 1980s results from the establishment of the Canadian Broadcast Program Development Fund in 1983, which allocated 35 million dollars for participation in the Canadian television industry. As Applebaum and Hébert had observed back in 1982, the significant links between the film and television industries might suggest that seeing them “as a package” could have far-reaching effects is a view borne out by the considerable success of state involvement certainly in the television in-

dustry, and also, to a degree, in feature film production in the years following this decision. In order to better reflect its transformed mandate and goals, the CFDC was renamed Telefilm Canada in February 1984. One of the essential reasons for this policy direction is demonstrated by this observation from the Canadian Radio Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) in January 1983,

With the exception of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Canadian English-language broadcasters offer audiences virtually no Canadian entertainment in peak viewing period and next to no Canadian drama—light or serious—at any time in their schedules.<sup>28</sup>

So successful has Telefilm's involvement in the television industries been that it is difficult to remember, some twenty years on, that the situation for Canadian television production was so grave. With millions poured into this industry, Canadian television production boomed in both exports, and in the quantity of Canadian product available to audiences. One significant element of this policy shift was that to qualify for funds from the Broadcast Program Development Fund, producers had to secure an agreement from a broadcaster to televise the program in question, and since feature films were eligible for funds from this source, those which were beneficiaries of the program were also assured broadcast of their movie sometime in the following two years, and between 7pm and 11pm. And because of this swift positioning of Telefilm in the television industry, there was clearly considerable incentive for film producers to consider their projects as television films primarily, rather than as "features" for theatrical release. Given the longstanding problems of

distribution for Canadian feature films, this shift toward a model that emphasized broadcast over theatrical release for feature films would seem on the surface to provide a partial solution to the vexing problem of distribution. If one of the long-standing problems of the Canadian cinema was that few Canadians even had the opportunity to see Canadian films (should they actually want to), the Broadcast Fund would seem to have gone a long way toward ameliorating that problem.

It should be noted here as well that the Broadcast Fund also led, temporarily, to that anomaly of the 1980s, the broadcast/theatrical-release hybrid. These were films which were produced in two different versions, one for cinematic release and one (generally much longer, to be broadcast over more than one night) for television. Examples of these hybrid productions include Claude Fournier's Gabrielle Roy adaptation *Bonheur d'occasion* (1983) and *Joshua Then and Now* (1985), the Ted Kotcheff-directed adaptation of a celebrated novel by Mordecai Richler which attempted to replicate the earlier success of *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* (1974), another Kotcheff-Richler collaboration. With the exception of Gilles Carle's *Les Plouffe* (1981), these multi-format projects seldom succeeded in either cinemas or on television. Canadian producer Robert Lantos explains why these productions were so seldom successful: "hybrids are dangerous because if the primary purpose is to make a film for TV, it means the product has to be paced and constructed in a way which is diametrically opposed to what a feature film is. To try and make something work in two different mediums is a mistake."<sup>29</sup>

Nonetheless, despite a slightly rocky start in which private broadcasters were reluctant to participate in the scheme, the success of the Broadcast Fund has been enor-

mous. For example, between 1987 and 1994, the volume of certified-Canadian production increased from \$294 million to \$923 million.<sup>30</sup> This kind of success has demonstrated that if the Canadian television industry can be so transformed through policy, then the feature film industry, especially those elements of it concerned primarily still with initial theatrical exhibition, should be susceptible to such dramatic policy influence as well.

The establishment in 1986 of the Feature Film Fund sought to replicate the success of the Broadcast Fund. With an initial appropriation of \$30 million, the Fund was designed to invest in high-profile feature films which were "culturally relevant," a phrase used by Telefilm itself, perhaps to distance these productions from the presumption of cultural irrelevance associated with films produced under the body's previous incentive scheme, the Capital Cost Allowance. One of the successes of the Broadcast Fund had been its concern with both production and the subsequent dissemination of this product through assured broadcast stipulations. Following this, and in light of the fact that the Feature Film Fund was already in place to aid in the production of films, Telefilm established the Distribution Fund in 1988 to direct policy attention to one of the longest-standing and most consistently pointed-to structural failings of the Canadian film industry: the inability to get Canadian feature films adequately distributed in Canada and around the world. There are many explanations for this vexing problem, but most commonly it is argued that the root cause of this situation is the almost complete domination (until very recently, as I will discuss shortly) of film distribution in Canada by major U.S. firms having direct and very longstanding connections to both Hollywood studios and with the major Canadian exhibition chains. Canadian films are discriminated against by

the U.S. distributors, so this argument goes, and Canadian distributors have a difficult time competing with their U.S. competitors because of economies of scale, among other reasons (as noted above). The Distribution Fund was originally allocated \$17 million per year to assist Canadian distributors to acquire and distribute Canadian feature films, and also to aid their promotion.

There are many measures of policy success, but in the late 1980s and early 1990s, it did appear that the Canadian film industry was enjoying a full flowering, largely as a result of state policy interventions. Not only was the production sector booming—with hundreds of millions of dollars worth of production undertaken annually, thus creating employment, generating capital, and making a major and fast-growing contribution to the national economy—but critical acclaim and international success appeared as well with such films as *Le Déclin de l'empire américain*, *I've Heard the Mermaid's Singing* (1987, Patricia Rozema), *Life Classes* (1987, William D. MacGillivray) and *Family Viewing* (1987, Atom Egoyan) achieving accolades at international festivals. Together, these and other titles created the sensation of a movement in Canada, another New Wave, as it were, comparable to the one of the 1960s/early 1970s which became the subject of many late 1970s/early 1980s books on Canadian cinema, including the original *Self Portrait*. Brenda Longfellow and Diane Burgess will discuss later in this anthology the economic, political and aesthetic ramifications of the Toronto and Pacific New Waves that began in the late 1980s/early 1990s. It is perhaps because the Toronto New Wave, for one, has relatively recently come to an end, as Longfellow argues, that so many books<sup>31</sup> like *Self Portraits*, can now look back on what was a relatively sustained period of critically acclaimed features emerging from Canada's

state-subsidized film industry, some of which even enjoying modest commercial success, like Atom Egoyan's *The Sweet Hereafter* (1997).

### **Canadian Film in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

With the number of Canadian film directors who are either internationally renowned or commercially successful (or both) growing, and the volume of film production increasing by leaps and bounds still (approaching a billion dollars annually over the past few years), and with *extremely* profitable and celebrated films such as Arcand's *Les Invasions barbares* (2003) cleaning up at both box-office and on the international awards show and festivals circuit, it would appear that the Canadian government film policy has been extraordinarily successful. By some measures, it has been. However, there are lingering problems with the national film industry, and not everyone is happy with the performance of either the Canadian industry as a producer of cultural commodities or with the state apparatus, which supports this industry. One complaint about the current state of affairs (again, a booming billion dollar industry!) is that much of what accounts for this commercial success makes no contribution to the cultural life of the nation because it is being produced for international export. So-called "runaway productions," those films and television programs made in Canada solely to take advantage of a variety of federal, provincial and civic incentives of various sorts, even though they often become part of the Canadian mediascape as well, appearing on the nations film or television screens, are seen by many as foreign because of their conception as export commodities. This argument fails, first, to take account of the notorious problem of evaluating a national thematic, and, second, to consider

the fact that a vibrant and well capitalized production sector is a pre-requisite, not necessarily a threat to, the vitality of a minor national cinema which seeks to create a variety of cultural commodities to suit the wide variety of the tastes of its citizens, from difficult art house fare to commercial genre films. Véronneau, in his chapter, explains how it is precisely through generic diversity that the Quebec film industry has managed to enjoy such success over the last twenty years. Beyond the diversified production of genres, however, the notion of diversity also applies to the reception and afterlife of films. Once forgotten films occasionally stage remarkable comebacks, while the hugely celebrated (and/or popular) movies of one era fall out of favour and disappear from our cultural memory. Some films even shift categories, sliding effortlessly from schlock to art or the other way round. For instance, who would have thought in 1981 that the man who gave Canadian cinema its first exploding head, David Cronenberg, would be worthy, twenty years down the road, of a 400-page<sup>32</sup> academic treatise?

Another problem that is regularly pointed to with regard to the current state of the Canadian film industry is that it remains, for many Canadians, hard to see very many Canadian feature films in cinemas. The problem of the relative scarcity of Canadian films on Canadian movie screens is one upon which there has been little progress over the past thirty years. Indeed, the percentage of box-office revenue earned by Canadian films in Canada has always been seen as lamentably low. Many point, once again, to the American strangle-hold on distribution as the root cause of this, but the evidence does not support this analysis. In fact, Charles Acland has shown that Canadian distributors' market share has increased enormously in the late 1990s, demonstrating, for example, that in a snap-



shot week (in January of 1998), films distributed by Canadian distributors accounted for over one-quarter of the total of the top ten box-office grossers that week.<sup>33</sup> Nevertheless, the actual number of Canadian films making their way onto Canadian screens has remained more or less unchanged, and this fact has been seen as evidence of a policy failure, despite the various important factors of which it takes no account. For example, broadcast does have the potential to expose Canadian films to far larger audiences than does theatrical release, as well as the fact that certain titles which do relatively poorly in theatrical release can sometimes develop "cult" followings and do exceptionally well in the videotape/DVD market, as John Fawcett's *Ginger Snaps* (2000) illustrates.

Nevertheless, increasing the audience for Canadian films in Canada was one of the primary goals behind Heritage Canada's latest utterance, "From Script to Screen: New Policy Directions for Canadian Feature Film," published in 2000, which stated its goal was to increase the box-office take of Canadian films in Canada to five percent by 2005, and to increase their box-office take internationally as well. One aspect of the new policy which has been somewhat controversial is its bracketing off of some of the new money for the feature film industry (which totalled 50 million per annum) in what they call a "performance envelope," where past performance will be rewarded in distributing the funds. Some have complained this emphasis on rewarding commercial success will undermine the strong tradition of personal auteur filmmaking in Canada. As recently as May 2004, at the Genie Awards presentation, acclaimed Canadian actor Sarah Polley took up this position. The *Globe and Mail* reported that, "Polley made the most politically controversial remark of the evening, a clear rebuke of Telefilm Canada's new policy of

funding films with commercial, not auteur appeal. 'I don't think the answer to making our films more accessible is to make dumber, more commercial movies.'"<sup>34</sup> Given the awards handed out that night, it is difficult to guess what "dumber, more commercial" movies Polley is talking about since the evening's big winners, Arcand's almost unanimously critically-celebrated *Les Invasions barbares* and Guy Maddin's utterly eccentric *The Saddest Music in the World* (which itself seems poised to break Maddin out of the art-house ghetto into a modicum of mainstream box-office success) can hardly be seen as particularly dumb or crassly commercial. This anecdote points to many of the central threads running through Canadian film policy and film production that this chapter has attempted to address.

First, there remains a stubborn divide in the discourse surrounding the Canadian cinema between art and commerce, phoney though this divide may be in practice. Not surprisingly, Loiselle and McSorley have chosen to include in this anthology a number of essays that struggle with this very issue. Second, the evaluation of film policies as failed or successful are complicated and fraught, having many dimensions, a fact that requires such evaluations to be nuanced and flexible in order to take account of this complexity. In fact, as the 2004 Genie Awards make plain, clearly commercially and critically successful films such as those by Arcand and Maddin need to be weighed against the fact that the film Polley won her award for, *My Life Without Me* (Isabel Coixet, 2003) is one that a vast majority of Canadians never had an opportunity to see on cinema screens, despite its healthy box-office returns in Spain and Japan, because of its scant distribution in Canada. In any case, where Pageau was correct in pointing out that in the 1960s and '70s "many films were made here," this chapter

demonstrates that largely as a result of state intervention in the industry, exponentially more have been made since the 1980s. It unfortunately remains the case that not that many Canadians ever see them on their local movie screens.

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> The “Tax-Shelter Boom” is a moment in the history of the Canadian cinema which is explained, very briefly, like this: In 1979, 70 “certified-Canadian” feature films were shot in Canada, in a year that Hollywood only produced 95. The reason so many films were produced in Canada during the tax-shelter boom (which ran, basically, from 1978-81, depending on one’s definition of “boom”) was that in the mid-1970s the federal government, which had been trying to create an homegrown feature film industry through other policy instruments (largely by making equity investments in productions), attempted to ameliorate the persistent problem of a paucity of capital which was seen to be the primary obstacle to feature film production in Canada. The Revenue department created a Capital Cost Allowance, a 100 percent tax write-off for money invested in certified Canadian feature films. Concurrent to this measure, the federal government established another body, The Canadian Audio-Visual Certification Office (CAVCO) to adjudicate which films were sufficiently “Canadian” to qualify for the tax-shelter. As well, the CFDC shifted its strategy from equity investment in feature film projects to providing the bridge funding, for the first, and most difficult to acquire capital, until sufficient investors could be found. Capital flooded into the industry and a huge number of films were made, most of them genre films. The best known titles are, perhaps, Bob Clark’s *Porky’s* (1982) and Ivan Reitman’s *Meatballs* (1979). Even these successful films, and certainly the failed ones, were seen as “scandalous” under the regime of cultural nationalism which then, and largely still, utterly dominates the discourse of the (Anglophone) Canadian film culture.

<sup>2</sup> See Peter Urquhart’s “You Should Know Something -- *Anything* -- About this Movie. You Paid For It,” *Canadian Journal of Film Studies* 12.2 (Fall 2003): 64-80, which demonstrates that a great many Canadian films of the tax-shelter boom were not of the kind usually associated with the period, and have been erased from Canadian film history largely because of the era in which they emerged.

<sup>3</sup> Pierre Pageau, “A Survey of the Commercial Cinema 1963-1977,” *Self Portrait: Essays on the Canadian and Quebec Cinemas*, eds. Piers Handling and Pierre Véronneau, (Ottawa: Canadian Film Institute, 1980) 157.

<sup>4</sup> Michael Dorland, *So Close to the State/s: The Emergence of Canadian Feature Film Policy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998) 94.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> D.J. Turner, *Canadian Feature Film Index – 1913-1985* (Ottawa: National Film, Television and Sound Archives, 1987) 81-82

<sup>7</sup> Telefilm Canada. Annual Report 1968-1969, page 9.

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<sup>8</sup> Ted Magder, *Canada's Hollywood: The Canadian State and Feature Films* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993) 136.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Charles Acland, "Popular Film in Canada: Revisiting the Absent Audience," eds. David Taras and Beverley Rasporich, *A Passion for Identity: An Introduction to Canadian Studies* (third edition) (Toronto: ITP Nelson, 1997) 281-296.

<sup>11</sup> Paul Almond. Introductory talk at the Cinémathèque québécoise's "Paul Almond retrospective," October 2000. Michael Spencer was the Executive Director of the CFDC from 1968-1978.

<sup>12</sup> S. D. Lyon and Michael Trebilcock, *Public Strategy and Motion Pictures: The Choice of Instruments to Promote the Development of the Canadian Feature Film Production Industry* (Toronto: Ontario Economic Council, 1982) 31.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. 33

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Manjunath Pendakur, *Canadian Dreams and American Control: The Political Economy of the Canadian Film Industry* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1990) 180-1.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. 181.

<sup>17</sup> The film was released as *Yesterday* in English in Montreal and Tokyo, as *Gabrielle* in French-dubbed version in Montreal, as *Scoring* in Toronto, and as *This Time Forever* for foreign sales and Pay TV after May 1982. See D.J. Turner, page 291

<sup>18</sup> Pendakur 183-4.

<sup>19</sup> For example, the very fact of its location in a large Canadian mall renders obvious the national specificity since department stores such as Eaton's were only found in Canada, and there is only one mall in the world which has Michael Snow's majestic sculpture of flying Canada Geese, "Flight Stop."

<sup>20</sup> Magder, 195

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. 196

<sup>22</sup> Indeed, the Greenberg-produced *Porky's* remains the highest-grossing Canadian film of all time, taking in, according to various reports, somewhere in the vicinity of 155 million dollars worldwide.

<sup>23</sup> See Urquhart.

<sup>24</sup> Ira Wagman, "Rock the Nation: MuchMusic, Cultural Policy and the Development of English-Canadian Music-Video Programming, 1979-1984," *Canadian Journal of Communications* 26.4 (2001): 504.

<sup>25</sup> See also Mike Gasher "From sacred cows to white elephants: Cultural policy under siege," *Canadian Issues/Thèmes canadiens*, 19 (1997): 13-30.

<sup>26</sup> Report of the Federal Cultural Policy Review Committee, page 259.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. 258.

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<sup>28</sup> Quoted in *Making Our Voices Heard: Canadian Broadcasting and Film For the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (The Report of the Mandate Review Committee, CBC, NFB, Telefilm, Government of Canada, 2000) 196.

<sup>29</sup> Quoted in Magder, 212

<sup>30</sup> Pierre Juneau, Catherine Murray, Peter Herrdorf (Mandate Review Committee: CBC, NFB, Telefilm). *Making Our Voices Heard: Canadian Broadcasting and Film for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Ottawa, Canadian Heritage, 1996) 202.

<sup>31</sup> Beyond Wyndham Wise and Geoff Pevere's *Take One Special Edition 2004*, which focuses specifically on Toronto New Wave filmmakers, there are a number of other books published since 2000 that look back at the achievements of the various Canadian new waves of the 1980s-90s. These include William Beard and Jerry White's *North of Everything: English-Canadian Cinema since 1980* (2002), Katherine Monk's *Weird Sex & Snowshoes and Other Canadian Film Phenomena* (2001), David Spaner's *Dreaming in the Rain* (2003), Michael Spencer and Suzan Ayscough's *Hollywood North* (2003) and Gene Walz's *Canada's Best Features* (2002).

<sup>32</sup> If one includes footnotes, bibliography and index, William Beard's *The Artist as Monster: The Cinema of David Cronenberg* (2001) is actually 469 pages long.

<sup>33</sup> Charles Acland. "Screen Space, Screen Time, and Canadian Exhibition," *North of Everything: English-Canadian Cinema since 1980*. William Beard and Jerry White, eds. (Edmonton: University of Edmonton Press, 2002) 13.

<sup>34</sup> "Barbarian Invasions is Gem of Genies," *Globe and Mail*, May 2, 2004. Online edition.

## CHAPTER 3

### *The Decline... and the Rise of English Canada's Quebec Cinema.*

André Loiselle  
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In the previous chapter, Peter Urquhart observes that there “remains a stubborn divide in the discourse surrounding Canadian cinema between art and commerce.” This divide does not only affect the discourse around film funding policies in this country, but also operates within the critical and scholarly practices that construct a particular idea of Canadian cinema through activities like reviewing in the popular media, publishing in specialized venues, programming festivals, curating retrospectives, and teaching in film departments. One of the best examples of this divide can be found in the portrait of Quebec cinema that English-Canadian critics and scholars have drawn over the last several years, especially since the tremendously successful release of Denys Arcand's *Le Déclin de l'empire américain* in 1986. The French-Canadian films that Anglophone reviewers, critics, curators and educators have elected to discuss, screen and preserve project an im-

age of Quebec cinema that positions it firmly on the side of art and culture, and separates it from the mundane considerations of commerce and industry. In the process, they have created their *own* Quebec cinema. English Canada's Quebec cinema, as I will show below, overlaps only in part with the cinema produced and consumed by the people of Quebec.

### **Decline and Rise**

When *Déclin* won the Genie award for best feature film of the year in 1987 – along with seven other Genies – producer Roger Frappier asked rhetorically “who would have guessed that *The Decline of the American Empire* would result in the rise of Canadian cinema? [...] It's a success story between Quebec and Canadian cinema. Let's hope we have many more.”<sup>1</sup> Frappier's comments proved more accurate than he probably imagined. First, the success of *Déclin* indeed marked the rise, or rebirth, of Canadian cinema. Within two years of its release, films from all over Canada started enjoying considerable critical, and even some commercial success. As pointed out in other chapters of this collection, 1987 saw the premières of such important films as *Life Classes* (William McGilvray) in Nova Scotia, *Un zoo la nuit* (Jean-Claude Lauzon) in Quebec, *I've heard the Mermaid Singing* (Patricia Rozema) and *Family Viewing* (Atom Egoyan) in Ontario, and by 1988, *Tales from the Gimli Hospital* (Guy Maddin) started attracting attention to the Winnipeg Film Group. Even David Cronenberg, after two American productions, albeit shot in Ontario (*Dead Zone* [1984] and *The Fly* [1986]), decided to return to a Canadian setting in 1988 for *Dead Ringers*, which explicitly takes place in “Toronto, Canada”. With *Déclin*, Canadian cinema became hot again.



Second, and most importantly for my purpose, this “success story between Quebec and Canadian cinema” played a significant role in bridging the gap between the two cinematic solitudes. When *Déclin* triumphed at the Genies, Jay Scott of the *Globe and Mail* was quick to remind everyone that “Toronto critics *first* discovered and supported *Decline* at the Cannes film festival [while] the Quebec critical reaction was more tepid.”<sup>2</sup> This “discovery” of *Déclin* marked the (re)commencement of a process of ownership whereby English Canadians or, more precisely, English-Canadian film critics and scholars (because average English-Canadian spectators never cared much for the cinemas of Canada in either English or French) have appropriated certain films from Quebec and integrated them within their rhetorical formation of a distinct Canadian cinema. In effect, English Canada’s Quebec cinema has become something of a *genre* within Canadian cinema, a genre that is characterized by art-house film aesthetics, a degree of political engagement and a typically Canadian quirkiness enhanced by a dose of European refinement. A revelling instance of English-Canada’s Quebec cinema can be found in the anthology *North of Everything: English-Canadian Cinema since 1980* (2002). Seth Feldman in his “Foreword”<sup>3</sup> and the editors, Bill Beard and Jerry White, in their “Introduction” lament the absence of Quebec cinema from their anthology, but justify it by insisting that there are “two national cinemas”<sup>4</sup> in Canada, and they chose to discuss only one of them: Canadian cinema produced in English. Fair enough! However, neither notes that Geoff Pevere’s contribution to the collection, which examines “an important quality of ‘weirdness’ in English-Canadian feature filmmaking,”<sup>5</sup> actually includes brief remarks on Denis Villeneuve’s “weird” device of having a

fish narrating the story of his French-language art-house hit, *Maelström* (2000).

That Pevere's reference to *Maelström* goes basically un-noticed and is thus seamlessly integrated in a commentary on English-Canadian cinema, attests that this film, in some way, *belongs* to English Canada. Katherine Monk, reviewer for the *Vancouver Sun*, is among those who lump *Maelström* with other Canadian art films: "Laced with love, guilt and a desire for self-destruction, *Maelström* fits right into the Canadian tradition of near-fatalistic realism – until you realize the narrator is an ancient fish about to have its head cut off [...] An altogether original tale, replete with humour, fantasy, and palpable emotion, *Maelström* succeeds where many other Canadian films have failed, and it ushers in a new generation of *auteurs*."<sup>6</sup> Similarly, when it was reviewed in the Toronto film magazine *Take One*, Villeneuve's second feature was praised for being "different and offbeat and *distinctly Canadian*. It fits nicely with our other art-house films."<sup>7</sup> It could be argued, indeed, that Quebec cinema is the *true* art-house cinema of English Canada, or at least this is what the results of the Genie awards often seem to suggest. For instance, while the members of the Toronto-based Academy of Canadian Cinema and Television bestowed five awards onto Villeneuve's film at the January 2001 ceremony, they completely ignored Gary Burns's *waydowntown* (2000), an equally creative art film from Calgary.<sup>8</sup> A dozen years earlier, Jean-Claude Lauzon's *Un zoo la nuit* had even more overwhelmingly crushed the English-Canadian competition, winning 13 awards, leaving only two for *I've heard the Mermaids singing* and none for *Family Viewing* and *Life Classes*.<sup>9</sup> Of course, the Academy's membership also includes Francophone cineastes who might help tip the scale in favour of Quebec films. But it is rather unlikely that the

Quebec votes would, in and of themselves, skew the results to such an extent that *Zoo* would end up winning a record number of awards and *Life Classes* would garner none. *Maelström*, *Un zoo la nuit*, *Déclin* and many other Quebec films seem to be ideal English-Canadian art films, for not only do they have an appropriate measure of weirdness and existential angst, they also have *French* as an added artsy bonus.<sup>10</sup> One could even suggest, perhaps unfairly, that François Girard's *succès d'estime* in English Canada in the 1990s, with *32 Short Films about Glenn Gould* (1993) and *The Red Violin* (1998), owes much to his Franco-phone heritage.

### English-Canada's Quebec Cinema: Past and Present

English Canada's embracing of French-Canadian cinema is obviously not a recent phenomenon. That the original *Self Portrait* (1980) was in great part a translation of the French-language anthology *Les Cinémas canadiens* (1978) bears witness to an interest that dates back to at least the 1970s. Similarly, Quebec cinema occupies an important part in the earlier anthology *The Canadian Film Reader* (1977), edited by Seth Feldman and Joyce Nelson, with several articles devoted to Quebec filmmakers active since the 1960s, such as Pierre Perrault, Claude Jutra, Gilles Carle and Denys Arcand.<sup>11</sup> To this day, certain Anglophone critics still see these four men, along with Michel Brault and Jean Pierre Lefebvre, as the core of Quebec *auteur* cinema.<sup>12</sup> Feldman's 1984 collection, *Take Two: A Tribute to Film in Canada* also has a section called "Les Québécois," which again concentrates on the oeuvres of Perrault, Carle and others. Notably, *Take Two's* object of study, at least in terms of French Canada, is very similar to that of *The Canadian Film Reader*. Perrault and Carle are at

the core of both collections' Quebec content,<sup>13</sup> Mireille Dansereau's *La Vie rêvée* (1972) appears as the prototypical Quebec feminist film in each book,<sup>14</sup> and films like Jutra's *Mon oncle Antoine* (1971) and Brault's *Les Ordres* (1974),<sup>15</sup> which feature prominently in the *Film Reader* are also addressed at some length in *Take Two*. What is most striking about the 1984 publication is that it remains firmly anchored in the Quebec film tradition of the early 1970s and does not address issues specific to Quebec cinema of late 1970s and early 1980s. The only "recent" Quebec feature films to receive any attention at all in *Take Two* are those of already well-established filmmakers, such as Carle's *Les Plouffe* (1981) and *Maria Chapdelaine* (1983), Claude Fournier's *Bonheur d'occasion* (aka *The Tin Flute*, 1983),<sup>16</sup> Perrault's *La Bête lumineuse* (1982)<sup>17</sup> and Francis Mankiewicz's *Les bons débarras* (1980)<sup>18</sup>. Younger filmmakers who started making feature films in the late 1970s or early 1980s are generally ignored. Yves Simoneau's *Les Célébrations* (1978), and *Les Yeux rouges ou la vérité accidentelle* (1982), and André Mélançon's *Comme les six doigts de la main* (1978), for instance, do not even receive a footnote, while new films by women, like Micheline Lanctôt's *L'homme à tout faire* (1980) and Louise Carré's *Ça peut pas être l'hiver on a même pas eu d'été* (1980) only get a mention in passing.<sup>19</sup>

This lack of interest in Quebec films of the late 1970s and early 1980s is not particularly surprising though for, after the impressive output of the late 1960s and early 1970s, Quebec cinema ran out of steam, reaching dismal numbers of production in 1981, with only two major releases: *Les Plouffe* and Mankiewicz's *Les beaux souvenirs*.<sup>20</sup> This left both Francophone and Anglophone critics with little to write about. With the success of *Déclin* and the outburst of creativity that followed, English-Canadians rediscovered Quebec cinema. In this regard, it is useful to

compare the Anglophone press' response to *Les Plouffe*, the most successful Quebec film of the early 1980s,<sup>21</sup> with that of *Déclin* to get a sense of this renewed appeal. According to Loren Lerner's comprehensive bibliography of Canadian cinema, the English-Canadian coverage of *Les Plouffe* counts less than a dozen articles, most of which from Montreal and Toronto publications, such as *Cinema Canada*, *The Gazette*, *MacLean's* and *Saturday Night*.<sup>22</sup> *Déclin*, for its part, was discussed in over 30 English-Canadian articles and, significantly, was reviewed in regional newspapers beyond *The Gazette*, *The Toronto Star* and *The Globe and Mail*, such as *The Ottawa Citizen*, *The Winnipeg Free Press*, *The Halifax Chronicle-Herald* and *The Vancouver Sun*, as well as in a number of marginal publications like the *Medical Post* and the *Canadian Churchman*.<sup>23</sup> With *Déclin*, Quebec cinema became an actual topic of discussion, beyond the tiny circle of diehard nationalist film critics.

Since then, the English-Canadian press has continued to pay much more attention than before to productions from Quebec. *Un Zoo la nuit*, for instance, was also the object of about 30 articles in English-Canadian publications, again including regional newspapers like the *Calgary Herald*, *The Winnipeg Free Press* and *The Halifax Chronicle-Herald*, as well as some unlikely sources such as *Marketing Magazine*.<sup>24</sup> Even very well-regarded films of the 1970s and early 1980s never reached such coverage in English Canada. *Mon oncle Antoine*, Carle's *La vraie nature de Bernadette* (1972), *Les Ordres* and *Les bons débarras* received no more than a dozen English-Canadian reviews each at the time of their initial releases.<sup>25</sup> Clearly, as Piers Handling once pointed out to me, the emergence of numerous Film Festivals across Canada since the late 1970s has played a crucial role in increasing the presence of Quebec films in

other provinces. But still, it took the success of *Déclin* to turn a vague interest into a genuine fascination.

Since the 1990s, English-language reviews of the best Quebec art films have become so common that they are virtually impossible to innumerate. Robert Lepage's first art film *Le Confessionnal* (1995), for instance, was not only reviewed by almost every newspaper in Canada, from Victoria's *Times-Colonist* to Halifax's *Daily News*,<sup>26</sup> it was also the only Canadian film (in either French or English) to make it on the "top ten of 1995" lists of over half a dozen Anglophone critics from across the country<sup>27</sup>. However, if English Canada now seems to be paying much more attention to Quebec cinema than before *Déclin*, what has *not* changed is the type of Quebec films that are discussed in the press. English Canada's Quebec cinema has always been and continues to be almost exclusively comprised of quirky art films, displaying either Quebec's putative European edge or its equally putative radical politics. The commercially successful genre films that Pierre Véronneau discusses in his contribution to this anthology, those that are neither artsy, nor European-looking, nor political, are generally ignored by Anglophone reviewers writing either for newspapers or specialized magazines. For instance, while in 2000 *Maelström* received attention from practically every film critic in the country, the top-grossing Quebec film of the year, Gabriel Pelletier's romantic comedy *La Vie après l'amour* (2000) was *completely* ignored outside Quebec (see the Appendix, which lists the top-10 Quebec films at the box office, as well as all Quebec films that have earned more than \$1 000 000). Montreal's *Gazette* is the *only* English-language paper that acknowledged the existence of the film when it came out. For Toronto and Vancouver critics, *La Vie après l'amour* simply does not exist. This is typical of English Canada's Quebec cinema.

### All Art and no Commerce make for an Idealized Cinema

Since the 1970s, English Canadian scholars and critics have focused on French-Canadian films that are character-centred, shun Hollywood-style action, and seriously attempt to reflect the unbearable lightness and heaviness of being Québécois, either in the form of explicit political statements or under the guise of protagonists whose comportment can relatively easily be linked to the French-Canadian condition. Case in point: the farcical philandering of *Déclin*'s history professors was readily interpreted in a 1986 *Globe and Mail* review as a commentary on the "withdrawal from political engagement after the failure of the Quiet Revolution's agenda for the transformation of Quebec society."<sup>28</sup> *Self Portrait*'s most important English-language addition to *Les Cinémas canadiens*, Peter Harcourt's seminal "1964: The Beginning of a Beginning,"<sup>29</sup> is the best illustration of English Canada's ideal Quebec cinema, in its preference for Gilles Groulx's *Le Chat dans le sac* (1964) over Don Owen's *Nobody Waved Good-Bye* (1964). While both films meet the various thematic and aesthetic canonical criteria identified by Michael Dorland<sup>30</sup> and Peter Morris,<sup>31</sup> such as a documentary look and problematic masculinity, *Le Chat* is superior to *Nobody*, in Harcourt's view, because Owen's film lacks the Godardian "cinematic sophistication" of Groulx's and the Toronto director doesn't display the same degree of political awareness as the Québécois cineaste.<sup>32</sup> In short, the superiority of *Le Chat* "is the result not only of Groulx's personal talent but also of the fact that he is Québécois," which affords him the double advantage of being more ideologically astute and more directly influenced by French cinema.<sup>33</sup> For scholars like Harcourt, desperately trying to construct an

ideal Canadian cinema distinct from Hollywood, films from Quebec like *Le Chat dans le sac* represented a home-grown French New Wave that asserted Canada's difference in the face of America.<sup>34</sup> But those Quebec films that did not assert such non-Hollywood political acuteness and non-commercial visual style, never made it into English Canada's Quebec cinema.

Rarely did the tremendously successful genre films that attracted hundreds of thousands of French-Canadian spectators to the movie theatres in the late 1960s and 1970s make their way into articles or books on Canadian cinema. The only references to popular Quebec cinema in the original *Self Portrait* are in the segments translated from the *Les Cinémas canadiens*.<sup>35</sup> The first anthology on Canadian cinema, *Canadian Film Reader*, makes one reference to each of the masterpieces of the "Films de Fesses" genre, *Deux femmes en or* (1970, Claude Fournier), *Valérie* (1968, Denis Héroux) and *L'Initiation* (1970, Denis Héroux – which is mistakenly referred to as "l'Invitation"),<sup>36</sup> and ignores completely *IXE-13* (1971, Jacques Godbout), *J'ai mon voyage* (1973, Denis Héroux) and *Bingo* (1974, Jean-Claude Lord), which all enjoyed a considerable degree of popularity in their day. *Take Two* also mentions in passing *Deux femmes en or* and *Valérie*,<sup>37</sup> and ignores all the others. The only popular films that get any degree of critical attention are those of Gilles Carle, whose art films, like *La vraie nature de Bernadette*, provide some respectability to his popular comedies like *Les Mâles* (1970).<sup>38</sup> The same remains true today. For instance, George Melnyk in his *One Hundred Years of Canadian Cinema* published in 2004, makes one reference to *Deux femmes en or*<sup>39</sup> and overlooks completely *IXE-13*, *Bingo* and *J'ai mon voyage*. Melnyk's indifference to Quebec popular cinema is not surprising, though, since he pays no attention either to English-Canadian popular



films like *The Mask* (1961, Julian Roffman), *The Silent Partner* (1978, Daryl Duke) and *My Bloody Valentine* (1981, George Mihalka), to say nothing of the fact that he seems completely unaware of the existence of either Paul Almond, Sandy Wilson or John Greyson...

While *Déclin* and *Un Zoo la nuit*, along with Arcand's second hit of the decade, *Jésus de Montréal* (1989), have overwhelmed the critical discourse around Quebec cinema in the 1980s, most Anglophone reviewers, critics and historians have disregarded the top-grossing Quebec film of the 1980s, Robert Ménard's *Cruising Bar* (1989), a brainless sex comedy about four men (all played by Michel Côté made famous by his performance in the play *Broue* [1979]) in search of female companionship. While *Cruising Bar* and *Déclin* share much in terms of their lascivious humour, the former lacks the latter's underlying commentary on the repression of *engagé* politics following the failure of the *souveraineté-association* project at the 1980 referendum. Rather than offering a perceptive analysis of the situation, *Cruising Bar* is a mere symptom of it. Therefore it has been dismissed by the Anglophone press, and labelled a "curious Quebec artefact", replete with "cheap, stupid laughs [which] finally subvert *Cruising Bar's* comic premise, revealing a low-brow meanness [that] seems dated and out of step, like the Meech Lake Accord, which come to think of it, was funnier while it lasted."<sup>40</sup> It is merely a beer ad, "a 90-minute spot for Labatts."<sup>41</sup>

Alain Chartrand's *Ding et Dong, le film* (1990), the top-grossing Quebec film of 1990, was similarly dismissed outside Quebec. Described as a "jack-dog of a movie," this slapstick comedy about two bumbling idiots, Ding (Yves Thériault) and Dong (Claude Meunier) an extremely well-known comic duo in French Canada, had the briefest of runs at Toronto's Canada Square in late Fall 1991.<sup>42</sup> It dis-

appeared as quickly from the screens of English Canada as from the minds of Canadian critics. Recent publications, such as Monk's *Weird Sex and Snowshoes, and Other Canadian Film Phenomena* (2001), Christopher Gittings's *Canadian National Cinema* (2002), Wyndham Wise's *Take One's Essential Guide to Canadian Film* (2001) and Melnyk's *One Hundred Years of Canadian Cinema*, have absolutely nothing to say about either *Ding et Dong* or *Cruising Bar*. Nothing! Rather than *Ding et Dong*, the Quebec film that was embraced by English-Canadian critics in 1990-91 is André Forcier's *Une histoire inventée*, a respectable success in Quebec but nowhere near the box-office hit that *Ding et Dong* was.<sup>43</sup> A flawlessly eccentric film about unrequited love amongst jazz musicians, actors involved in a "quirky production of *Othello*," an alcoholic cop infatuated with an ex-nun, and foolish suitors following like puppies the gorgeous Florence (Louise Marleau), *Une histoire inventée* was hailed by Edmonton reviewer Marc Horton as a "Funny, ironical film, a pure delight; Wonderful characters people [this] bizarre, yet believable comedy." For it is not merely mindless humour, it also has "things to say about alienation and how we all struggle to overcome the feelings of abject loneliness."<sup>44</sup> Quirky angst, mixed with a "sort of magic realism," made for a "wondrous fantasy" according to Craig MacInnis of the *Toronto Star*.<sup>45</sup> This perfect example of English Canada's idealized Quebec cinema was picked by *Calgary Herald*'s Fred Haeseker as one of the top ten films of 1991, along side Jonathan Demme's *Silence of the Lambs*, George Sluizer's *The Vanishing*, and Gus Van Sant's *My Own Private Idaho*.<sup>46</sup>

Forcier is the kind of weird Quebec filmmaker whose oeuvre is seen as an embodiment (good or bad) of Quebec culture in English-Canadian film magazines such as *Cine-action* and *Take One*. In Chantal Nadeau's "Women in

French-Quebec Cinema" published in *Cineaction* in 1992, *Une histoire inventée* and Forcier's earlier *Kalamazoo* (1988) are singled out as prototypes of Quebec films in which "women are made to appear as the mythic incarnation of the praying mantis [,] half-goddesses, half demons."<sup>47</sup> Ironically, but not surprisingly, *Cruising Bar*, which would have actually fitted rather well in Nadeau's argument about 1980s masculinist Quebec films, is not examined at all. While feminists condemn the portrayal of women in Forcier's films, in the mildly masculinist discourse of *Take One*, Forcier is considered one of the heirs of Gilles Carle,<sup>48</sup> and has thus acquired a permanent place amongst the magazine's favourite Quebec *auteurs*. His films are regularly discussed but rarely critiqued. Even his truly mediocre *La Comtesse de Baton Rouge* from 1997, deserved a four-page article in *Take One*.<sup>49</sup> Yet, Louis Saïa's *Les Boys*, also from 1997, the hockey comedy that triggered the most successful franchise in Quebec film history, was never seriously reviewed in the magazine. Although it ran in Toronto in April 1998,<sup>50</sup> it has only received brief references here and there in articles on other films.<sup>51</sup> The same is true of other very lucrative but hardly artistic Quebec films such as *Nuit de noces* (2001, Émile Gaudreault) and *Nez rouge* (2003, Éric Canuel), which were seen by hundreds of thousands of French Canadians but not reviewed in *Take One*. Conversely, the contemporary art film *La Femme qui boit* (2001, Bernard Émond) was praised for its "moments of great beauty" and its depiction of the main character's (Élyse Guilbault) "progressive slippage down the perilous slope of alcohol abuse."<sup>52</sup> Granted that *Les Boys* is not as emotionally engaging as a domestic tragedy like *La Femme qui boit*, it remains a far more important film (would it be only because of its tremendous popular appeal) than either *La Femme* or *La Comtesse*. However, for Anglophone

critics wedded to a specific idea of Quebec cinema, Saïa's ensemble of Joe-six-packs, who play hockey and hang out at the tavern and the strip club, couldn't possibly compete with Forcier's menagerie of circus freaks.

It could be argued that *Take One* is a magazine primarily concerned with art cinema (of any nation) and it is, therefore, normal that a commercial film like *Les Boys* would not be reviewed in this venue. Maybe... However, when English Canada tried to produce its own brainless popular movies, Paul Gross's *Men with Brooms* (2002), about a team of curlers, and Eric Till's *Duct Tape Forever* (2002), based on the "Red Green" TV show, the editors of the magazine did not shy away from devoting a long article to these Canadian comedies.<sup>53</sup> Both films were as moronic as *Les Boys*, but there seems to be a double standard whereby dim-witted English-Canadian movies get better treatment than their Francophone counterparts. To be fair, *Take One* has published articles on commercially successful Quebec films, including Denise Filiatrault's adaptation of Michel Tremblay's novel *C't'a ton tour, Laura Cadieux* (1971). Yet as commercially successful as Filiatrault's film might have been, it is not in the same category as *Cruising Bar, Ding et Dong* and *Les Boys*, all of which could be described as shapeless successions of stupid skits without an ounce of cultural value. *C't'a ton tour, Laura Cadieux* (1998) has the respected actor-singer Ginette Reno in the title role of overweight, working-class housewife Laura, and more importantly, it is based on a work by Michel Tremblay. Isa Tousignant writes about the film in these terms:

[it is] pure, unabashed Quebecois culture. *C't'a ton tour, Laura Cadieux*, marketed as the Quebecois feel-good movie of the year, lives up to its reputation; its pastiche of humour and melodrama is charming and

lighthearted, offering plenty of laughs and, at times, moments of unthreatening reflection. The characters are rich, with big and boisterous personalities; the settings give us a nice tour of Montreal at its most endearing; and the cultural references are sometimes almost uncomfortably perceptive. Best of all, *C't'a ton tour*, *Laura Cadieux* provides a refreshing voice for a segment of society that rarely gets to speak: women. Fat women. The film, set in the present, stars Ginette Reno, Quebecoise diva extraordinaire, as the infamous Laura. Directed by actress, writer, producer, singer and Genie-winner, Denise Filiatrault, it is based on a 1971 novel by the patron saint of 20th-century French-Canadian literature, theatre and cinema – Michel Tremblay.<sup>54</sup>

As much as there is an English Canadian Quebec cinema, there is also an English Canadian Quebec literature, at the centre of which stands Tremblay<sup>55</sup> and his cornucopia of carnivalesque characters, moving in the quaint working-class neighborhoods of exotic Montreal. These characters, with their stereotypically Québécois “*joual de vivre*,” could only be embraced by Anglophone critics and cinephiles.

**“Mon Canada comprend le Québec”<sup>56</sup>: A Quebec that Canada can understand.**

Arcand’s *Les Invasions barbares* (2003), Jean-François Pouliot’s *La grande séduction* (2003, aka *Seducing Doctor Lewis*) and Charles Binamé’s *Séraphin: Un homme et son péché* (2002), three of the most lucrative movies in Quebec film history, also received some attention in *Take One*. But again, these are not pieces of mindlessly entertaining schlock. All three convey aspects of Quebec culture that

English Canadians have grown to understand and appreciate, the most important of which being the relationship between character and landscape. *La grande séduction*, a quaint comedy that looks like a mixture of Kirk Jones's *Waking Ned Devine* (1998), Brault and Perrault's *Pour la suite du monde* (1963) and Gogol's *Inspector General* (1836), follows a group of down-and-out fishermen who try to fool a Doctor into setting up a clinic in their isolated community as part of a project to open a plastic-container factory in the village. It was reviewed in typical terms by Maurie Alioff's: "Beyond the Tati-esque sight gags, the deadpan reactions, the quirky dialogue and the funny details like one villager's array of goony-looking hats, you genuinely empathize with these characters."<sup>57</sup> The character with whom we identify most is Doctor Christopher Lewis (David Boutin), a jaded Montrealer, who finds the "truth" about himself on the secluded hamlet of Ste-Marie-La-Mauderne. A coke-snorting, cricket-playing, jazz-listening, plastic surgeon, Christopher realizes in the course of the film that his life has been a lie. He has been betrayed by his girlfriend and his best friend, who have been having an affair for years, and he has spent his career putting fake breasts, fake cheekbones and fake noses on people. It is ironically through the lie manufactured by the 120 citizens of Ste-Marie that he comes to understand the "truth". "To discover the truth he's seeking," writes Alioff, "Christopher must embrace the island itself. When he first lands on Ste-Marie-La-Mauderne, its bleak rawness shocks him [...] As the film advances, *Seducing Doctor Lewis*, effectively portrays the way a primitive, seemingly forbidding place can magically transform in the eyes of an outsider [...] He falls in love with its landscape and people."<sup>58</sup> Although Alioff does not point this out, this gradual embracing of the landscape is a central theme of English Canada's

Quebec cinema. Seth Feldman recognized it in a well-known article published in *Take Two*, which argues that while English Canadian characters remain severed in silence from their landscape, characters in Quebec films have a proclivity for “assimilating themselves into the demands of the environment.”<sup>59</sup> Doctor Lewis typically adopts this “French model of assimilation with a found landscape.”<sup>60</sup> When, in the end, we see him walking happily from his house to the water with his fishing rod trying, as he does everyday, to seduce the village’s young attractive Eve (Lucie Laurier), who always turns him down, we get a sense that he truly belongs in this barren landscape: “La terre que Dieu donna à Caïn”.

Natural landscape is also central to *Les Invasions barbares* and *Séraphin*. When Rémy (Rémy Girard), the fun-loving womanizer from *Déclin*, faces death in *Invasions* he yearns to return to the pastoral environment of Lac Memphrémagog, where he can find solace within the landscape that nurtured him and his friends. It is fitting that a film about the death of Quebec – with its “génération lyrique”<sup>61</sup> dying off and its most talented young people leaving for England and the US or sailing around the globe, while the rest seek an escape from their meaningless existences in the dead-end world of drug abuse – would depict this final reconciliation between the Quebec character and the trees and lakes so emblematic of French Canada. Quebec, a “desperate nation” among many other “countries [which] are a vanishing species”<sup>62</sup> according to Arcand, struggles to postpone its inevitable demise by trying to find refuge in its natural and linguistic landscapes. But when the struggle becomes too overwhelmingly futile Quebec, like Rémy, shall simply accept death with serenity and peace.

While *Invasions* presents the end point of Quebec's assimilation of its territory, *Séraphin* symbolizes its beginning. Set in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, when French Canadians led by legendary Curé Labelle began "occupying the territory"<sup>63</sup> of Northern Quebec, Binamé's adaptation of Claude Henri Grignon's classic 1930s novel and radio drama centres on Séraphin (Pierre Lebeau), the oppressive miser whose energy is focused inwardly, amassing money, fearing sex and sequestering his young wife, Donaldalda (Karine Vanasse). His polar opposite is Donaldalda's true love, Alexis (Roy Dupuis), the centrifugal *coureur-des-bois* who assimilates the landscape and embodies values antithetical to the ideology of greed that competing cultures promote. Not surprisingly, Binamé was praised by *Take One* reviewer Isa Tousignant for taking "upon his shoulders, more or less, the entire weight of Quebec culture. There are few tales so entrenched in the province's identity."<sup>64</sup>

Even more so than *La grande séduction* and *Les Invasions barbares*, *Séraphin* is recognizably anchored in Quebec culture, and could thus readily be incorporated in English Canada's Quebec cinema. Furthermore, Binamé had already gained a solid reputation in English Canada as one of the new creative forces of 1990s independent Quebec cinema with his art films, especially *Eldorado* (1992). Together with *Le Confessionnal* and Micheline Lanctôt's *Deux actrices* (1993), *Eldorado* has been interpreted by Jerry White as projecting "a vision of Québécois identity in the 90s as something that is fragmented, artificial and close to cinematic illusion."<sup>65</sup> At the heart of the fragmented identity conveyed in *Deux Actrices* and *Eldorado*, is the performance of Pascale Bussières, a powerfully understated actress who has the ability to embody ambiguity with sensuality and self-awareness. She is the ideal incarnation of



exotically attractive Quebec angst. Having appeared in both Quebec art films by Lantôt, Villeneuve, Léa Pool and Manon Briand, and English-Canadian productions by Guy Maddin, Jeremy Podeswa and Patricia Rozema, Bussi res has become the emblem of a Canadian cinema that includes the hippest filmmakers of both English and French Canada. Not surprisingly, she ended up on the cover of the June-March 2004 issue of *Take One*.

### **The New *Auteurs* of English Canada's Quebec Cinema**

In the same issue of *Take One*, Maurie Alioff reviews Louis B langer's *Gaz Bar Blues* (2003), about the comings and goings of quirky characters around a traditional full-service garage struggling in the late 1980s against competition from self-service stations. By managing to name virtually every great Quebec *auteurs* in his review, from Carle, Jutra and Arcand, to Forcier and Lauzon, Alioff implicitly inducts B langer in the Hall of Fame of English Canada's Quebec cinema.<sup>66</sup> B langer is one of a half dozen member of the newest French-Canadian new wave, which also includes Villeneuve, Briand and Andr  Turpin, all of whom have managed to attract "a niche audience in tune with their often insouciant attitude and eagerness to play with the medium."<sup>67</sup> In 1996, Villeneuve, Turpin and Brian had joined three other young filmmakers, Jennifer Alleyn, Marie-Julie Dallaire and Arto Paragamian to co-direct the omnibus film *Cosmos*, produced by Roger Frappier. Quirky, often verging on fantasy, *Cosmos* quickly found its place in the pages of *Take One*. "Certainly, *Cosmos* is a display of serious filmmaking chops," writes Maurie Alioff.

Fluidly shot by Turpin in an amalgam of styles, the picture brims over with fancy camera angles, ostentatiously long dollies, a trippy soundtrack and generally convincing performances. As in other urban anthologies, the principal characters are mainly young, loopy types who inhabit an inner city that's either sleek and trendy, or picturesquely low rent. In two of the stories, the filmmakers conjure up surreal dream spaces: a hotel that feels more like an insurance company office, a hairdressing salon that's also a music video station. Thematically, the film's various episodes both draw from and satirize Gen-X angst, MTV-sensibility, serial killer mythology, immigrant alienation, and, of course, neurotic sexual relations.<sup>68</sup>

Since the late 1990s, Villeuneuve, Briand, with *Turbulence des fluides* (2002) and Turpin, with *Un crabe dans la tête* (2001), have further established their reputation as the new English Canadian Quebec *auteurs*.<sup>69</sup> Also to be added to this list is Philippe Falardeau. His first feature was the 2000 "mockumentary" *La Moitié gauche du frigo* about Christophe (Paul Ahmarani) an unemployed engineer looking for more creative and fulfilling work. Throughout the film, he goes from interview to interview without ever finding a meaningful job. He eventually leaves Montreal and moves to Vancouver, where he plays music and sells encyclopedias to earn a living. The film has been praised by Anglophone critics, who saw it as being "in keeping with the long-standing *Canadian* tradition of ambiguous narrative closure, Christophe's fortunes seem mixed [...]. He is playing in a band but has a fight in the street with his boss (an encyclopedia distributor), which we can only assume ends in disaster. The final title tells us Christophe ends up teaching music at a secondary school, which,

come to think of it, might be the perfect place for him."<sup>70</sup> The "documentary" is "directed" by Christophe's roommate, Stéphane (Stéphane Demers), an armchair Marxist and overly self-righteous filmmaker. Stéphane (whose side of the fridge, the right one, is always well garnished, while his roommate's is increasingly depleted) follows Christophe around with his camera, hoping to sell his documentary on unemployment to Radio-Canada. Stéphane is not a silent observer, though. He lectures Christophe on the evils of globalization, interferes during interviews and records scenes that Christophe would obviously prefer to keep private, and clearly enjoys throwing insults at English-speaking C.E.O.s, who perpetuate the capitalist system that alienates heroic workers like Christophe. Ironically, Stéphane ends up unemployed as the film closes.

Insults towards English-speaking bosses did not upset Anglophone critics. Actually, one such scene of anti-Anglophone-imperialist bashing was commended as "a moment of telling self-consciousness."<sup>71</sup> In fact, part of the appeal of Quebec for Canadians seems to be this putative hatred of "*maudits Anglais*." Without claiming that English Canadians are guilt-ridden masochists who find pleasure in being insulting, one could argue that this positive response to attacks emerges from the consciousness of belonging to a culture that has oppressed others. Perhaps insults against English Canadians pronounced by French Canadians in films allow the former to criticize their own culture vicariously through the latter's rant. On this subject, one is reminded of a moment in Michel Brault and Pierre Perrault's documentary *L'Acadie, l'Acadie!?* (1971), in which a group of Francophone students from New Brunswick occupy the University of Moncton in resistance against Anglophone authorities. Near the end, the Aca-

dian protestors receive a letter of support from Anglophone students from Simon Fraser University in British Columbia, which reads: "We identify with your unique struggle against Anglo-Saxon racism. In the future, we hope we can unite around the slogan : 'Two nations, one enemy'." There are probably many Anglophones who, like the students from B.C., despise "Anglo-Saxon racism" as much as Francophones do.

In any event, English Canada's penchant for self-criticism has certainly helped the career of another Falardeau: Pierre, the radical, foul-mouthed *enfant terrible* of Quebec cinema. In 1999, Pierre Falardeau enjoyed a huge commercial success with *Elvis Gratton 2 – Miracle à Memphis*, which became the top-grossing French-Canadian film in Quebec that year. Yet English-Canada ignored it almost completely, with merely one reference in the *Globe and Mail*, about its success in Quebec.<sup>72</sup> This is not because Falardeau's film was too radical for English Canada. On the contrary, *Elvis Gratton 2* is a facile comedy, about a fat Elvis impersonator (Julien Poulin) without a hint of political conscience (he re-appears as an even more grotesque buffoon in *Elvis Gratton XXX*, released in 2004). However, Falardeau's more politically radical films, *15 février, 1839* (2001), *Octobre* (1994) and *Le Party* (1990), while less successful at the box-office than *Elvis Gratton 2*, have attracted considerable interest in English Canada, for they embody Quebec's anti-establishment political awareness.

*Le Party*, about the agony of life in a federal penitentiary, temporarily alleviated by a performance by a burlesque troupe of variety comedians, rock singers and strippers, was praised by Jay Scott of the *Globe and Mail* as "certainly an assault on 'good taste,' but it is deeply understanding of, and compassionate toward, human behaviour."<sup>73</sup> Craig MacInnis also appreciated this film that "at

once, revels in the raw, open impulses of men behind bars, and the off-angle poignancy of the underclass, including exotic dancer Alexandra (Charlotte Laurier), who finds greater dignity doffing off her clothes in front of convicts than working at some menial job in Quebec's pink-collar ghetto."<sup>74</sup> "For issue-oriented film-goers," added Michael Walsh of *The Province*, "Falardeau's raw, episodic drama can be viewed as an indictment of the system. A stark, shock-filled exposé of the dehumanizing effects of penal servitude, its sympathies are entirely with the inmates. Nor is *Le Party* without insight into the after-hours popular culture. Falardeau shows us a world in which working class entertainers (strippers, burlesque comedians, rock musicians) have no trouble identifying with the social 'outlaws' for whom they are performing."<sup>75</sup> "Despite the violence and the vulgarity," said yet another critic, "what's most memorable about the movie are its rare moments of kindness and solidarity among the prisoners and the visitors."<sup>76</sup> The film's raw naturalism, and mix of vulgarity and kindness are qualities that make it a telling reflection of English Canada's perception of Quebec as a hot-bed of politically radical, artistically daring, culturally outrageous and emotionally authentic freaks.

*Octobre*, which offers an insider's look at the kidnapping and assassination of Pierre Laporte by the Front de Libération du Québec in October 1970, was Falardeau's most fiercely debated film in English Canada. It was profusely maligned for its "heinous message" against "fellow citizens who speak English,"<sup>77</sup> many voicing outrage at the fact that Telefilm helped "finance a sympathetic film about FLQ traitors."<sup>78</sup> As many, however, praised the federal funding agency for financing this powerful film,<sup>79</sup> an exercise in claustrophobia and terror on the part of both the kidnappers (Hugo Dubé, Luc Picard, Pierre Rivard,

Denis Trudel) and the hostage (Serge Houde). Fred Hae-seker of the *Calgary Herald* was especially moved by “the impassioned account by one of the kidnappers of being treated as a second-class citizen at an Anglo-owned place of work.”<sup>80</sup> *The Ottawa Citizen*’s Jay Stone, in his review “Changing *Octobre* History” argued that it is precisely “the ideology of separation, or at least of its extremist fringes, that gives *Octobre* its energy and its interest. As such, it is not quite the outrageous movie you might fear.”<sup>81</sup> Gittings in *Canadian National Cinema* also discusses perceptively Falardeau’s changing of history in *Octobre*,<sup>82</sup> but he has no interest in either *Elvis Gratton 2* or its predecessor, *Elvis Gratton, le film!* (1985), Falardeau’s genuinely funny first feature.

Falardeau’s most obviously anti-English film, *15 février, 1839* about the execution by hanging of Patriots who, in 1837-38, had vainly tried to overthrow the British authorities then in power in Lower Canada, incited much more passion in Quebec than in the rest of the country. After Falardeau was denied funds from Telefilm (in stead, it elected to fund Michel Brault’s *Quand je serai parti... vous vivrez encore* [1999], on the same historical subject), thousands of French-Canadian supporters, including Jacques Parizeau, started rallying around the project and putting pressure on the federal funding agency to allow the production of the film.<sup>83</sup> Popular support was certainly instrumental in permitting the production to go ahead. So much so in fact, that some Quebec critics romantically labeled *15 février, 1839*, “le film du peuple!”<sup>84</sup> There were no rallies for or against the film in English Canada, but it still found strong supporters amongst Anglophones. For Maurie Alioff, “the movie offers a vivid, often compelling picture of a colonized people’s rage at their dispossession.”<sup>85</sup> He finds only one disquieting thing about *15*

*février, 1839*, the fact that “Falardeau’s allusions imply that Quebec continues to strain under the yoke of a brutal conqueror, ‘as if nothing has changed,’ and the ‘English,’ as one character puts it, ‘can never be forgiven – even by God’.” Yet “Falardeau is about more than just sovereignist rants [...] *15 février, 1839* is as much about human beings facing death as it is polemic.”<sup>86</sup> As strange as it may seem, or perhaps not, Quebec’s most anti-Anglo cineaste always has his most political films screened throughout Canada and applauded by critics from Vancouver to Halifax, while his popular comedies remain unknown.

### ***Léolo*: the Paragon of English Canada’s Quebec Cinema.**

Derogatory comments against Anglophones are also part of the appeal of Jean-Claude Lauzon’s *Léolo* (1992), the story of a working-class kid called Léo (Maxime Collin), whose only escape from his dreadful reality is the dream world that he created around his phantasmagoric Italian origins, hence his imaginary identity as “*Léolo*”. The film counts a few amusing jokes at the expense of Anglophones. For instance, since *Léolo* never learned the term for his private parts in his English class, he thought maybe Anglophones did not have said private parts. But the most important anti-English aspect of the film is that Léo’s brother, Fernand (Yves Montmarquette), is beaten up by an Anglophone punk (Lorne Brass), after which he decides to take up body-building. But this is a vain attempt at resisting oppression, since no matter how muscular he becomes, he remains defenceless before his English-speaking nemesis. Interestingly, only Anglophone critics have paid any serious attention to the role of the “Anglo bully”<sup>87</sup> in the film. Those francophone critics who have noted the English-speaking character have tended to ridi-

cule him as a cliché, sarcastically referring to him as “un méchant anglophone.”<sup>88</sup> But for Anglophone critics, the language-specific identity of the oppressor does not come across as a joke. It is rather a sign of Quebec’s presumed politics, which re-enforces the preconceptions that make up their image of French-Canadian cinema. This of course is not the only aspect of Lauzon’s second feature that appealed to English Canadian critics.<sup>89</sup> Its mixture of French-sounding English lyricism, quirky Québécois characters and a blend of art and religion make it one of the most admired works of the canon. It is one of only seven films that make it on Geoff Pevere and Greig Dymond’s list of “Canada’s Coolest French Language Movies,” published in their *Mondo Canuck: A Canadian Pop Culture Odyssey* (1996).<sup>90</sup> It is deemed “extraordinary” by Bill Marshall,<sup>91</sup> and “nothing less than a revelation in the Canadian film tradition” according to Katherine Monk.<sup>92</sup> It could be argued, in fact, that this film, which opened Toronto’s Festival of Festivals in September 1992 and was chosen to adorn the cover page of the very first issue of *Take One*, is the paragon of English Canada’s Quebec cinema.

At a screening of the film in Quebec City in June 1992, Lauzon complained that his film, while praised by English Canadians, was raising only tepid interest among his fellow Québécois: “*Léolo* is an important example of the phenomenon of Quebec cultural distinctiveness. That’s what international critics say about my film, in particular English-Canadian and American critics. They write dithyrambic reviews, saying that it is a masterpiece. And yet, in the Quebec press, reviews are lukewarm.”<sup>93</sup> Although Lauzon always had a penchant for acerbic whining, he did have a point here. Quebec critics did not praise the film nearly as much as their Anglophone counterparts. While both Canadian and Quebec critics admired the visual



quality of the film, the latter found it excessive in its use of language, voracious sensuality, and grotesque cruelty.<sup>94</sup> Others saw it as overly complaisant and full of slimy traps, “pièges gluants.”<sup>95</sup> Others still argued that the characters were empty, abstract, not anchored in reality.<sup>96</sup> Conversely, in English Canada, reviewers applauded unreservedly this “brilliantly quirky movie” that traces a “boy’s escape from [his] wacky family.”<sup>97</sup> Brian D. Johnson, in *Maclean’s* wrote, “Comic, tragic, erotic, poetic and operatic, *Leolo* is an adult drama that plumbs the dark secrets of childhood [...] A breathtaking portrait of an artist as a young boy, *Leolo* is in every sense a masterpiece.”<sup>98</sup> Johnson’s implicit reference to James Joyce is taken up again explicitly by Rick Groen in *The Globe and Mail*:

A portrait of a young artist that is dazzling enough to rival Joyce in its intensity, its allusiveness, its poetry, and its brutal evocation of home and hearth [...] with its consciously poetic narration and with its striking images counterpointed by an incisive score that ranges from Gilbert Bécaud to Tom Waits, the movie itself is an emblem of transformation – gathering lyrical momentum, it acts out its own theme, converting ugliness into a thing of beauty.<sup>99</sup>

Craig MacInnis of *The Toronto Star*, for his part, compared “Lauzon’s richly-embroidered vision” to that of Joyce by equating “the sexually eclectic journey that the film describes [to] a sort of *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Gland*.”<sup>100</sup>

The different responses between the Francophone and Anglophone critics are so striking that it seems as though they did not see the same film. And perhaps they didn’t! There are at least three versions of *Léolo* available

to Canadian viewers: a French-language version; a French-language version with English subtitles; and a version partially dubbed in English. The latter is the most widely available in English Canada. It is so widely available, indeed, that some Anglophone critics and historians, like Melnyk in his *One Hundred Years of Canadian Cinema*,<sup>101</sup> wrongly assume that there is only *one* version of the film and that it has an English-language narration. In fact, while the version most Anglophones are familiar with has a voice-over in English and dialogues in French with subtitles, the version that French-speaking Canadians know best has a very different narration in French, over the same dialogues. This difference is significant for much of the effect of this film stems precisely from the omnipresent narration which overwhelms the diegetic dialogues. The French-language narration of the original was seen by Quebec critics as one of the main flaws of the film. It was deemed invasive, “envahissante,”<sup>102</sup> spoken in an awkward idiom, “dans une langue improbable,”<sup>103</sup> a technique considered by most to be a misguided scheme to compensate for an overly fragmented narrative structure.<sup>104</sup> The English-language narration, while still gauche at times, is actually much better than its French-language counterpart insofar as it is less self-consciously lyrical and far less awkwardly pompous. The example of Léolo’s description of his father is telling. The francophone narrator uses overly poetic metaphors to express the ugliness of the working class man:

Des rides le dessinent sans parler de son visage, si ce n’est que pour crier l’âge qui les ont [sic] creusées. Un air entre un bonjour et un adieu. Celui d’un éternel midi sans façon entamé par une poignée de temps. Un front étendu jusqu’au lendemain de son

menton, où un coup s'agrippe désespérément à des épaules bedonnantes.

A literal translation of this passage would read:

Wrinkles draw him but speak naught of his face, except to scream the age that dug them. A look between a good day and a good bye. That of an eternal, casual noon, commenced by a handful of time. A forehead stretched to the tomorrow of his chin, where a neck clings to potbellied shoulders.

If it sounds awkward it's because it is! The English narration keeps a certain degree of lyricism but is far less conceited.

Wrinkles line his face but reveal nothing but the age that dug them. Somewhere, between good morning and goodbye, an eternal, untouched moon [sic] pricked by a sliver of time, a forehead that stretched beyond his chin into a neck that clung desperately to bulging shoulders.

A younger-sounding, less-affected voice makes for a narration in English that manages to walk the fine line between poetry and doggerel. In French, the line is so often crossed that *Léolo* turns out to be less an evocative Joycian portrait of the artist as a child, than a ridiculous exercise in self-indulgent aggrandizement. In its English version, *Léolo* presents a perfect picture of Quebec as it is sometimes imagined by English Canada: a world where abject poverty and sordid acculturation co-exist with fertile creativity, intense artistic visions and rich European traditions. Not surprisingly, in *Take One's* 2004 poll of Canada's best

films, only Anglophone respondents (almost a dozen of them) included *Léolo* in their top-ten lists, giving it the twelfth position out of twenty. None of the French-Canadian participants to the poll included Lauzon's film in their ranking.<sup>105</sup>

My purpose in this chapter has not been to blame English-Canadian critics for praising films like *Léolo*, *Maelström*, *Le Déclin de l'empire américain* or *Le Confessionnal*. Some of these are genuinely accomplished works. I would actually urge Quebec film scholars and critics to pay as much attention to English Canada's best productions as their Anglophone counterparts have to Francophone films. Indeed, except for Pierre Véronneau's recent *David Cronenberg: la beauté du chaos* (2003, with Géraldine Poupon), and the already more than ten-years-old *À la recherche d'une identité: renaissance du cinéma d'auteur canadien-anglais* (1991), and *Les Cinémas du Canada* (1992), there is still a disheartening dearth of French-language material on English-Canadian cinema. But Quebec's endemic ignorance of English-Canadian culture is a different topic altogether. The point of *this* paper is that by focusing exclusively on one type of films from French Canada, Anglophone critics have created an image of Quebec cinema that is at best incomplete, and at worse misleading. In his dismissive review of *Ding et Dong*, Craig MacInnis makes this valid point: "If you're tired of hearing how Quebec 'culture' is so zoomy, so swish, so *très supérieur* to the rest of Canada's, then perhaps you should invest [your] money in this jack-dog of a movie and see what it is you've been missing."<sup>106</sup> Agreed! To get a true sense of Quebec culture, those who claim to be interested in its films should make an effort to discuss both its masterpieces and its "jack-

dog" movies. This is the only way to draw an accurate portrait of that culture (culture understood here in its inclusive, Herderian<sup>107</sup> sense), a portrait that avoids the pitfalls of lionization, exoticism and condescendence that have characterized for too long English Canada's imaginary Quebec.

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## ENDNOTES.

<sup>1</sup> Ron Base "Empire Strikes 8 Genies," *Toronto Star*, 19 Mar. 1987, E-1.

<sup>2</sup> Jay Scott, "Eight Genies Fall to American Empire," *Globe and Mail*, 19 Mar. 1987, D-1

<sup>3</sup> Seth Feldman, "Foreword," *North of Everything: English-Canadian Cinema since 1980* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2002) xiii.

<sup>4</sup> William Beard and Jerry White, "Introduction", *North of Everything*, xviii.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. xxi.

<sup>6</sup> Katherine Monk, *Weird Sex & Snowshoes and other Canadian Film Phenomena* (Vancouver, Raincoast books, 2001) 313.

<sup>7</sup> "Review: *Maelstrom*," *Take One* 31 (Spring 2001): 45. Emphasis added.

<sup>8</sup> John McKay, "Maelstrom Tops at Genies," *The Gazette*, 30 Jan 2001, B6.

<sup>9</sup> Peter Goddard, "La nuit belongs to Un zoo," *Toronto Star*, 23 March 1988, B1, B7

<sup>10</sup> Many English-Canadian films include snippets of French perhaps to increase their cachet while asserting their Canadianness through official bilingualism. Furthermore, Francophone female characters have made numerous appearances in Anglophone films. From the unforgettably bosomy Nicole Morin of *Goin' Down the Road* (1970, Don Shebib) to the sensually frigid Pascale Bussières of *When Night is Falling* (1995, Patricia Rozema) and *Twilight of the Ice Nymphs* (1997, Guy Maddin), to say nothing of the perversely childlike Geneviève Bujold of Paul Almond's Quebec trilogy (*Isabel* (1968), *Act of the Heart* (1970) and *Journey* (1972)), Cronenberg's *Dead Ringers* and Don McKellar's *Last Night* (1998), the Francophone women of English-Canadian cinema would deserve an analysis that is beyond the scope of this essay. It would also be worth looking into Bruce McDonald's profoundly misguided choice to cast a pathetically ridiculous Juliette Lewis as a Québécoise in *Picture Claire* (2001). While it would be a gross exaggeration to suggest that Lewis as a Québécoise is as offensive as white actors in black face, it remains nonetheless mind-boggling that in 2001 an English-Canadian filmmaker could be so naïve as to believe that a non-native French Canadian could pass for a Québécoise...

<sup>11</sup> See Louis Marcorelles, "Pierre Perrault"; Piers Handling, "Gilles Carle – A Thematic Response or, Scenes From Family Life"; Judy Wright and Debbie Magidson, "Making Films for Your Own People: An Interview with Denys Arcand," *Canadian Film Reader*, eds. Seth Feldman and Joyce Nelson (Toronto: Peter Martin Associates, 1977) 144-152, 199-207, 217-233.

<sup>12</sup> See, for instance, George Melnyk, "Toward the Quebec Auteur: From Perrault to Arcand," *Cineaction* 57 (2002) 16-29. See also "Take One's Ten Best Canadian Directors," *Take One* 34 (Sept. 2001) 45.

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<sup>13</sup> See Peter Harcourt, "Pierre Perrault and *Le Cinéma du vécu*"; David Clandfield, "Ritual and Recital: The Perrault Project"; James Leach, "The Sins of Gilles Carle", *Take Two: A Tribute to Film in Canada*, ed. Seth Feldman (Toronto: Irwin Publishing, 1984) 125-148, 160-168.

<sup>14</sup> See Ibrányi-Kiss, Á. "Mireille Dansereau: *La Vie rêvée*", *Canadian Film Reader*, 250-257 and Brenda Longfellow, "The Feminist Fiction Film in Québec: *La Vie rêvée* and *La Cuisine rouge*", *Take Two*, 149-159.

<sup>15</sup> About *Mon oncle Antoine*, see Bruce Elder, "Claude Jutra's *Mon oncle Antoine*," *Canadian Film Reader*, 194-198; Martin Knelman, "After We Came In" and Jay Scott, "Burnout in the Great White North," *Take Two*, 18-35. About *Les Ordres*, see Pierre Vaillières, "An Account by a Privileged Hostage of *Les Ordres*: Brault Has Misses His Shot", *Canadian Film Reader*, 264-267; Marshal Delaney, "Artists in the Shadows: Some Notable Canadian Movies", *Take Two*, 2-17.

<sup>16</sup> Knelman, 19-27 and Leach, "The Sins of Gilles Carle".

<sup>17</sup> Harcourt, 125, 135n15. Clandfield, 147.

<sup>18</sup> Delaney, 9-11.

<sup>19</sup> Longfellow, 151.

<sup>20</sup> Yves Lever, *Histoire générale du cinéma au Québec* (Montréal: Boréal, 1995) 312-314.

<sup>21</sup> *Les Plouffe* was the top grossing film of the 1980s before *Déclin* (see Appendix) and won 7 Genie awards in 1982. See Liam Lacey, "Ticket to Heaven Top Movie," *Globe and Mail*, 5 March 1982, 19.

<sup>22</sup> See the bibliography on Gilles Carle in Loren Lerner, *Canadian Film and Video: A Bibliography and Guide to the Literature*, vol 2. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997) 929-931.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. 857-863.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. 1137-1140

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. 1091-1092; 926-927; 906-907; 1178-1179, respectively.

<sup>26</sup> *Times-Colonist*, 29 Dec. 1995, 1; *Daily News*, 7 Sept. 1995, 30.

<sup>27</sup> See "Top Ten Movies 1995," *Calgary Herald*, 31 Dec, 1995. B.9. The critics involved in the poll are Fred Haeseker, *Calgary Herald*, Marc Horton, *Edmonton Journal*, Paul Delean and John Griffin, *Montreal Gazette*, Jay Stone, *Ottawa Citizen*, Judy Gerstel and Rob Salem, *Toronto Star*, Peter Birnie, *Vancouver Sun*.

<sup>28</sup> Bertrand Marotte, "Life reflects film in debate on sexual politics," *Globe and Mail*, 30 Aug. 1986, A8.

<sup>29</sup> Harcourt, Peter. "1964: The Beginning of a Beginning," in *Self Portrait*, ed. Pierre Véronneau and Piers Handling (Ottawa: Canadian Film Institute, 1980) 64-76.

<sup>30</sup> Michael Dorland, *So Close to the Sate/s* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998) 9.

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- <sup>31</sup> Peter Morris, "In Our Own Eyes: the Canonizing of Canadian Film" *Canadian Journal of Film Studies* 3.1 (Spring, 1994) 27-44.
- <sup>32</sup> Harcourt, 71, 76.
- <sup>33</sup> Ibid. 75.
- <sup>34</sup> See for instance Dorland, 6-10
- <sup>35</sup> Primarily, Pierre Pageau, "A survey of Commercial Cinema: 1963-1977," and Michel Houle, "Some Ideological and Thematic Aspects of the Quebec Cinema," 146-181.
- <sup>36</sup> John Hosfess, "Fear and Loathing to Order," *Canadian Film Reader*, 274.
- <sup>37</sup> On *Deux femmes en or* see Knelman, 26; on *Valérie* see James Leach, "Second Images: Reflections on the Canadian Cinema(s) in the Seventies," *Take Two*, 108
- <sup>38</sup> See Handling, "Gilles Carle – A Thematic Response or, Scenes From Family Life," and Leach, "The Sins of Gilles Carle."
- <sup>39</sup> George Melnyk, *One Hundred Years of Canadian Cinema* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004) 137.
- <sup>40</sup> Craig MacInnis, "Cruising Bar a curious Quebec artifact", *Toronto Star*, 12 Nov. 1990, C5.
- <sup>41</sup> Rick Groen, "The beer ad as comedy," *Globe and Mail*, 9 Nov, 1990, D10.
- <sup>42</sup> Craig MacInnis, "Quebecois hosers are Ding-Dong duo," *Toronto Star*, 29 Nov. 1991, D16.
- <sup>43</sup> While *Ding et Dong* made well over \$2,000,000, *Une histoire* never reached the \$1,000,000 mark. See Appendix.
- <sup>44</sup> Marc Horton, "Funny, ironical film a pure delight; Wonderful characters people bizarre, yet believable comedy," *Edmonton*, 5 April. 1991, C9.
- <sup>45</sup> Craig MacInnis, "Quebecer crafts wondrous fantasy," *Toronto Star*, 29 Oct. 1990, B3.
- <sup>46</sup> Fred Haeseker, "Memorable Movies of 1991," *Calgary Herald*, 29 Dec. 1991, C.1.
- <sup>47</sup> Chantal Nadeau, "Women in French-Quebec Cinema: The Space of socio-sexual (in)difference," *Cineaction*, 28 (spring 1992) 8
- <sup>48</sup> Maurie Alioff, "Gilles Carle and *La vraie nature de Bernadette* saintly sinner, sinful saint," *Take One* 38 (July-Aug. 2002) 29.
- <sup>49</sup> Gary Michael Dault, "Fables of desire: André Forcier's *La Comtesse de Baton Rouge*," *Take One* 18 (Dec.-Mar. 1997) 18-22.
- <sup>50</sup> *Les Boys* had its Quebec premiere on 11 December, 1997 (*La Presse*, 12 December 1997, C11) and opened in Toronto on 17 April (*Toronto Star*, 17 April, E1). *Les Boys II* had its Quebec premier a year almost to the day after its predecessor (*Voir*, 10 Dec. 1998, 54) and played in Toronto in April 1999 (*Toronto Star*, 2 April 1999, D16) but like the original *Boys* was never reviewed in *Take One*.
- <sup>51</sup> See for instance, Paul Eichhorn, "Power Play: putting drama on ice," *Take One* 22 (Dec.-Mar. 1998) 36-38.



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- <sup>52</sup> Isa Tousignant, "La Femme qui boit," *Take One* 33 (Jul. 2001) 40.
- <sup>53</sup> Cynthia Amsden, "Canadian comedy, eh? Paul Gross's *Men with Brooms* and Steve Smith's *Duct Tape Forever*," *Take One* 36 (Mar. 2002) 8-15.
- <sup>54</sup> Isa Tousignant, "C't'a ton tour, Laura Cadieux: a woman of substance," *Take One* 23 (Spring 1999) 32.
- <sup>55</sup> See for instance, Louise Ladouceur, "Canada's Michel Tremblay," *TTR: traduction, terminologie, redaction*, vol. 15, no. 1.  
URL: <http://www.erudit.org/revue/ttr/2002/v15/n1/006804ar.html>
- <sup>56</sup> Slogan used by the federalist camp during the 1995 Referendum on Quebec sovereignty.
- <sup>57</sup> Maurie Alioff, "Jean-François Pouliot's *Seducing Docteur Lewis*," *Take One* 44 (Dec. 2003) 11.
- <sup>58</sup> Ibid. 12.
- <sup>59</sup> Seth Feldman, "The Silent Subject in English Canadian Film," *Take Two*, 51.
- <sup>60</sup> Ibid. 52.
- <sup>61</sup> Term used by François Ricard in *La Génération lyrique*, (Boréal, 1992) to describe the French Canadian baby boomers who reaped the benefits of the Quiet Revolution.
- <sup>62</sup> Peter Howell, "A director in his prime: Denys Arcand's *Les Invasions barbares*," *Take One* 43 (Sept-Dec, 2003) p.29, 30.
- <sup>63</sup> Isa Tousignant, "Séraphin: Charles Binamé talks about the enduring appeal of a classic tale from Quebec," *Take One* 41 (Mar.-May 2003) 12.
- <sup>64</sup> Ibid. 8.
- <sup>65</sup> Jerry White, "To Act is to Be: Identity in Recent Québec Cinema," *Cineaction* 45 (1998), p. 19.
- <sup>66</sup> Maurie Alioff, "Gaz Bar Blues," *Take One* 45 (Mar. June 2004) 42-43.
- <sup>67</sup> Maurie Alioff, "André Turpin & Things that come from the Deep," *Take One* 35 (Dec 2001) 8.
- <sup>68</sup> Maurie Alioff, "Cosmos: the world according to Roger Frappier," *Take One* 17 (Fall 1997) 32.
- <sup>69</sup> See for instance, George Melnyk, "Quebec's Next Generation: From Lauzon to Turpin," *Cineaction* 61 (2003) 10-17. Melnyk includes Turpin and Villeneuve in the "Next Generation" of Quebec *auteurs*, along with Lauzon and Lepage, but ignores Briand.
- <sup>70</sup> Matthew Hays, "La Moitié gauche du frigo," *Take One* 31 (Spring 2001) 43.
- <sup>71</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>72</sup> Ray Conlogue, "Satire Manqué. Faux Elvis alive and well. Sour Gratton sequel huge hit in Quebec," *Globe and Mail*, 18 Aug. 1999, C1.
- <sup>73</sup> Jay Scott, "No holds barred for this party in pen," *Globe and Mail*, 23 Nov. 1990, C8

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- <sup>74</sup> Craig MacInnis, "Party in the hoosegaw captures carnality," *Toronto Star*, 9 Nov. 1990, E8.
- <sup>75</sup> Michael Walsh, "Stark view of life in prison: Sympathies are entirely with inmates," *The Province*, 15 Jul. 1991, 41.
- <sup>76</sup> "Quebec director breaks through on his own terms," *Toronto Star*, 2 Sep. 1990, C2.
- <sup>77</sup> William Johnson, "FLQ crisis film conveys heinous message," *Edmonton Journal* 8 Oct. 1994, C5.
- <sup>78</sup> Paul Gessel, "Ottawa helps finance a sympathetic film about FLQ traitors," *The Vancouver Sun*, 8 Oct. 1994, B1.
- <sup>79</sup> Don MacPherson, "Propaganda? No; Octobre simply doesn't paint FLQ members as demons," *The Gazette*, 15 Oct. 1994, B5.
- <sup>80</sup> Fred Haesecker, "Passion of FLQ revived," *Calgary Herald*, 10 Jan. 1995, C5.
- <sup>81</sup> Jay Stone, "Changing *Octobre* History; Film re-enacts 1970 FLQ crisis from killers' view," *The Ottawa Citizen*, 4 Oct. 1994, F1.
- <sup>82</sup> Christopher Gittings, *Canadian National Cinema* (London and New York, Routledge 2002) 186-189.
- <sup>83</sup> Bernard LeBrun, "Curieux Paradoxe," *La Presse* 5 May 1997, B2.
- <sup>84</sup> Christian Côté, "Le film du peuple," *Le Droit* 10 Feb. 2001, A4.
- <sup>85</sup> Maurie Alioff, "15 février, 1839," *Take One*, 32 (May 2001) 47.
- <sup>86</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>87</sup> Fred Haesecker, "East Montreal Slum Tale Balances Fantasy, Reality," *Calgary Herald*, 15 Jan. 1993, C2. See also Melnyk, "Quebec's Next Generation," 14.
- <sup>88</sup> Luc Perrault, "Le 17e Festival of Festivals: un nouveau départ pour *Léolo*," *La Presse* 12 Sept. 1992, D31.
- <sup>89</sup> I stress "English Canadian *critics*," because the film was apparently not very well received by average English Canadian spectators at the Festival of Festivals, some of whom even chastised Lauzon himself after the film's première, because of the infamous "cat rape" scene. See Robert Lévesque, "Festival of Festivals: Pauvre présence du Québec," *Le Devoir* 17 Sept. 1992, B3.
- <sup>90</sup> Geoff Pevere and Grig Dymond, *Mondo Canuck: A Canadian Pop Culture Odyssey* (Scarborough, Prentice Hall, 1996) 115. The six other films are, expectedly, *Le Chat dans le sac*, *Mon oncle Antoine*, *Les Ordres*, *Les bons débarras*, *Jésus de Montréal* and *Le Confessionnal*.
- <sup>91</sup> Bill Marshall, *Quebec National Cinema* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001) 115.
- <sup>92</sup> Monk, 309.
- <sup>93</sup> Léonce Gaudreault, "Avant-première ratée de Jean-Claude Lauzon à Québec," *Le Soleil*, 11 June 1992, C3. My translation: "*Léolo* est un exemple, un phénomène important de difference culturelle du Québec. C'est la critique internationale, et notamment au Canada anglais et chez les Américains, qui a

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dit ça en parlant de mon film en des termes dithyrambiques, parlant même de chef-d'oeuvre. Mais au Québec, la presse a été tiède.”

<sup>94</sup> “*Léolo*, porte-parole d’un Québec infantilise,” *Le Soleil* 29 janvier 1993, A9.

<sup>95</sup> Francine Pelletier, “*Léolo*: pourquoi faut-il toujours crier au génie?” *La Presse*, 20 juin 1992, B3.

<sup>96</sup> René Homier-Roy, “*Léolo*, un océan de fantasmes,” *L’Actualité* vol.17, no.10. 15 June 1992, 87.

<sup>97</sup> “Quebecer’s brilliantly quirky movie traces boy’s escape from wacky family,” *Edmonton Journal*, 16 June, 1992, C14.

<sup>98</sup> Brian D. Johnson, “Rebel Masterpiece,” *MacLean’s* vol. 105, no 21, 25 May 1992, 51.

<sup>99</sup> Rick Groen, “Dreams of a disturbing beauty,” *Globe and Mail* 10 Sept. 1992, C1.

<sup>100</sup> Craig McInnis, “*Leolo*’s genius transcends Quebec,” *Toronto Star*, 25 Sept 1992, C5.

<sup>101</sup> Melnyk, 204.

<sup>102</sup> Éric Fourlanty, “*Léolo*: Le poids des rêves,” *Voir*, vol. 6, no 27, 4 June 1992, 13.

<sup>103</sup> Homier-Roy, 87.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> The English Canadian respondents who voted for *Léolo* are Diane Burgess, Jerry Ciccoritti, Stacey Donen, Greg Klymkiw, Robert Lantos, David McIntosh, John Paizs, Jeremy Podeswa, Lia Rinaldo and Kevin Tierney. The Québécois respondents (none of whom voted for *Léolo*!) were Luc Chaput, Denis Chouinard, Patrick Gauthier, André Lavoie, Jean Pierre Lefebvre Gilles Marsolais, Ginette Petit and Ségolène Roederer. See Steve Gravestock, “Canada’s top 10 films of all time,” *Take One* 47 (Sept.-Dec. 2004) 25-36.

<sup>106</sup> McInnis, “Quebecois hosers are Ding-Dong duo,” D16.

<sup>107</sup> On J.G. Herder’s notion of culture as an all-inclusive whole that defines the “Nationalcharakter” of a people see, for instance, Frederick M. Barnard, *Herder on Nationality, Humanity and History* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2003) especially, pages 134 to 152.



## CHAPTER 4

### Genres and Variations: The Audiences of Quebec Cinema

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Film scholarship in Quebec, as well as in Canada for that matter, has long functioned according to a particular set of preconceived ideas, whereby textual analysis constitutes the main, if not the only, approach to the study of our national cinema. Furthermore, the texts that are chosen as objects of analysis are those that exhibit artistic and aesthetic value, those that can be most productively considered under the rubric of *auteur* cinema. As such, Quebec film scholars are not unlike their Anglophone counterparts who, as Loiselle points out in his chapter on “English Canada’s Quebec cinema”, display obvious biases towards French Canadian *auteur* films. The scholarly institution thus adopts a type of critical discourse that foregrounds *auteurism* and tends to disregard the multifaceted reality of film as an industry and a cultural practice. This attitude, shared by academics, critics and reviewers, stems in part from the fact that those who write about movies or teach in film departments have generally been educated within disciplines akin to literary studies and art history. Very few

have received any training in history, economics or sociology, or are familiar with methodologies developed in those fields. Consequently, issues related to film economics, spectatorship and reception are usually ignored. Similarly, studies in popular film cultures have been rare.

The same is not true of research on television, which operates within media and communication studies and commonly focuses on viewing practices and contexts, as well as on broadcasting policies and economic contingencies. Since television does not seem to be an *auteur's* medium, or a particularly effective means to explore new aesthetic avenues or conduct artistic experimentations, the texts produced for the small screen have demanded approaches other than those deployed in film and literary studies or art history. It is telling that those who have looked at television from a film studies perspective have generally criticized it harshly. In the "Introduction" to *Répertoire des séries, feuilletons et téléromans québécois* (1993), I identify the terms that are used by those scholars to comment on TV productions : "*Fast food* de l'imagination, pacotille, prostitution, visqueuse médiocrité, produit engendrant l'idolâtrie, atrophie de l'intelligence, faible âge mental des téléspectateurs."<sup>1</sup> Doubtlessly, some critics and scholars would use the same terminology to describe certain lowbrow Quebec feature films. But they would never ask themselves who actually goes to see these films.

In 1982, Ginette Major published a book whose methodology might have been questionable, but that nevertheless raised an important question by arguing that Quebec cinema was in search of its audience.<sup>2</sup> That this book was in great part ignored by critics and scholars shows that the question it posed threatened the very foundations of the dominant discourse surrounding French Canadian films at the time. In fact, Major did not attempt to study

viewing practices and economics. She merely wanted to look at films, rather traditionally, as texts that are interpreted by spectators within the parameters of *auteur* theory. Still, her willingness to pay attention to spectators was undeniably innovative, and rather than being dismissed this approach should have found its place at the heart of the research methods of film scholars and historians. More than twenty years later, I wish to adopt this strategy to examine Quebec cinema since the mid-1980s, and hopefully go beyond it, to account for various institutional discourses and filmic practices. In the process, I wish to counterbalance traditional histories of Quebec cinema that say as much through the films they ignore as through the works and filmmakers they choose to celebrate. Genre films are among those that rarely receive the attention they deserve.

At the premiere of his *Le dernier tunnel* (2004), Éric Canuel deplored that Quebec cinema has been monopolized by *auteur* cinema at the expense of genre films: "Il est temps au Québec que les films de genre soient pris au sérieux, que ce soit de la comédie, des drames d'amour, du fantastique, des films d'époque. Pendant 20 ans, sinon plus, on a été abreuvés de 'films d'auteur', par moments très intéressants, par moment plates à mourir. Moi je pense qu'on peut divertir tout en disant quelque chose."<sup>3</sup> Canuel is manifestly trying to escape the limitations imposed by a prescriptive critical and historical discourse that seeks to define what Quebec cinema *should* be, in spite of the reality of the industry. One of the most radical and polemical expression of this discourse is found in Michèle Garneau's PhD dissertation, in which the author proposes that the aesthetic and poetic stance of Quebec filmmakers is one that rejects pre-existing genres and favours the exploration of innovative forms of enunciation: "le cinéma québécois est un cinéma a-générique : plutôt que de s'engager sur un

énoncé *déjà constitué*, c'est-à-dire sur tel ou tel genre, c'est sur le seuil de l'énonciation elle-même que les cinéastes québécois se sont tenus, sur un énoncé *à constituer*."<sup>4</sup> In my opinion, such a reading ignores a significant number of recent productions that adopt generic conventions. In what follows, I will suggest that genre films have, in fact, dominated the landscape of Quebec cinema since the mid-1980s.

Actually, genre films have existed in Quebec for sixty years, but in a different form than what is found in Hollywood and other large production centres. In Hollywood, genre films are characterized by action-packed spectacles achieved through expensive special effects. The visual, or visceral, excitement created by this spectacular mode of address has ensured the success of these films in every region of the world. The high cost of such productions, however, far exceeds the financial resources available to small film industries. This is why spectacular genres like science-fiction or massive epics are rare in Quebec cinema, except under the guise of purposefully cheap-looking parodies such as Claude Desrosiers's *Dans une galaxie près de chez vous* (2004). Those who wish to specialize in these genres, like Yves Simoneau and Christian Duguay, generally choose to work for American producers. The genres that thrive in Quebec are those that can be realised with small budgets without jeopardizing the overall quality of the product and its potential for profit, such as comedies and thrillers. However, even with genres, there is no guaranteed recipe. Some of the worse films ever made in Quebec have been comedies, thrillers and awkward generic hybrids, like *Angelo, Fredo et Roméo* (1996, Pierre Plante), *J'en suis* (1996, Claude Fournier), *Pin-Pon : le film* (1999, Ghyslaine Côté), *La Bouteille* (2000, Alain Desrochers) and *Les Dangereux* (2002, Louis Saïa).



From the outset, the burgeoning French Canadian film industry, attempting to find its place on the screens of 1940s-50s Quebec, borrowed generic formulas from American and French movies, primarily melodramas, but also comedies of manners and historical films. While the style and form of those films were clearly derivative of traditions already established in other countries, the themes and locations were distinctively French Canadian. Starring well-known stage and radio personalities, and often based on already popular stories, these genre films, like *Un homme et son péché* (1948, Paul Gury), *Tit-Coq* (1952, Gratien Gélinas and René Delacroix) and especially *La petite Aurore l'enfant martyre* (1951, Jean-Yves Bigras) attracted huge crowds of Quebeckers. But the arrival of television in 1952 and the emergence of a new, more personal, approach to documentary filmmaking at the National Film Board in the late 1950s, which brought international recognition to filmmakers like Michel Brault, eclipsed these early forays into fiction filmmaking. This made it difficult for directors interested in genres to find a venue for their projects. Those who tried to experiment with fiction through NFB productions commissioned by Radio-Canada television, to be broadcast alongside the popular soap operas of the time, were generally given the cold shoulder.<sup>5</sup> The documentary practice of "direct cinema," as it became known, did not encourage the writing of screenplays and reliance on narrative imagination. A few NFB regulars did manage to produce genre films in the 1960s. Fernand Dansereau's historical drama, *Astataïon ou le Festin des morts* (1965) and Gilles Carle's comedy *La Vie heureuse de Léopold Z* (1965), are the best-known examples.<sup>6</sup> However, NFB producers always opposed a strong resistance against projects involving fiction, leading a number of filmmakers to leave the Board and join the private sector.

Pierre Patry, for instance, spent a few years at the NFB making films significantly different from the direct-cinema practice of his colleagues. His productions, even his documentaries, were carefully staged reconstructions. He loved working with comedians, but had few occasions to show his skills as a *metteur en scène* at the Board. He thus left in 1962 and created the private company Coopératio, dedicated to the production of features specifically designed for theatrical release. He brought along with him a few disenchanted colleagues from the NFB<sup>7</sup> and, in 1963, Coopératio released its first motion picture, *Trouble-fête*, directed by Patry. Like many other productions of the 1960s, *Trouble-fête* is less an *auteur* film than a collective creation orchestrated by Patry, where Jean-Claude Lord's script served as a basic structure around which the narrative evolved during the shooting process. This first film, which enjoyed some success in theatres, was followed by a few other productions, including adaptations from well-known novels such as André Langevin's *Poussière sur la ville* (published in 1953), and starring popular television actors. As such, Patry revived the formula from the 1940s and 50s, which relied on these elements (well-known story and local celebrities) to ensure success. Later genre films will follow a similar recipe. But also like the short-lived companies of the 1940s and 50s, Patry's company produced only a handful of films before closing down in 1966.

In spite of its brief existence, Coopératio remains an important venture, for it bridged the gap between the first wave of fiction films in the post-war era and the more viable companies that mushroomed after the federal government started investing in feature films through the Canadian Film Development Corp. and later Telefilm. It demonstrated that genre films, like melodrama, still appealed to Quebec audiences, and from the late 1960s on,

most commercially successful movies would reflect the enduring popularity of generic formulas. From the sexploitation movies of Denis Héroux (*Valérie*, 1968) and Claude Fournier (*Deux femmes en or*, 1970) to the comedies of television star Dominique Michel (*Tiens-toi bien après les oreilles à papa*, [1971, Jean Bissonnette] and *J'ai mon voyage*, [1973, Denis Héroux]), along with a few political thrillers (*Bingo* [1974, Jean-Claude Lord]) and horror films, generally shot in English (*The Pyx*, [1973, Harvey Hart] and *Shivers* [1975, David Cronenberg]), mainstream genres imposed themselves at the Quebec box office in the 1970s. But at the same time, this trend partially discredited genre cinema because of the lack of aesthetic value of these films, which paled in comparison to the more creative and personal works directed by Quebec's celebrated *auteurs*. Critics discussed Jean Pierre Lefebvre and Gilles Carle and ignored Denis Héroux and André Link (who produced David Cronenberg's early commercial movies); they promoted works that tried to mirror the complexity of Quebec culture rather than those that banked on commercialism and international fads and paid little attention to aesthetic quality and artistic subtlety. The former term of the art-vs-industry dichotomy was clearly favoured over the latter.

In his contribution to the first *Self Portrait*, Pierre Pageau writes that the history of commercial production in Quebec and Canada "tells us that the art/industry dilemma is sometimes solvable. [...But] during our daily discussions and our teaching, it is now possible for us to experience the fact that our cinema is almost unknown and that our films are seen by few people. Who are they being made for then? The goal of 'our' industry since 1975 has been to produce Canadian films so they can be seen by the Americans or the Japanese. The situation is an aberration."<sup>8</sup> The aberration results from the gap between the art

films that critics were supporting and the genre films that spectators paid to see. Denys Arcand's 1975 violent crime thriller, *Gina*, his most popular film of the 1970s but a critical failure<sup>9</sup> to which Pageau, typically, does not refer in his piece, and David Cronenberg's first Montreal horror film, *Shivers*, also from 1975, were both seen by sizable numbers of Quebec spectators.<sup>10</sup> But such schlock could only be interpreted as a sign "of total cultural cynicism."<sup>11</sup>

The rise of genre films led some critics to express despair before the disappearance of *auteur* cinema in the late 1970s and early 1980s, as if the receding tide of art films had exposed a beach filled with generic detritus, to paraphrase Michel Euvrard's lamentation. "Quand la mer se retire," writes Euvrard, we are left with "une grève jonchée d'objectifs non atteints, d'espoirs déçus, d'illusions, tranquilles ou pas."<sup>12</sup> True enough, many have suggested that the early 1980s witnessed a crisis of creativity in Quebec cinema. While *auteurs* had tended, in the 1970s, to deal with "important issues" for French Canadian society, the failure of the first referendum on sovereignty-association in 1980 transformed all that, and questions of identity and collective development disappeared from both Quebec culture in general and art films in particular. However, not everyone shares Euvrard's disappointment with the slow but seemingly ineluctable ascendancy of commerce over art. By the 1980s, certain critics joined the public in their growing interest for genre films. Denis Bellemare, for instance, rightfully noted in 1989 that by the 1980s Quebec cinema no longer defined itself exclusively in terms of its signified, "Quebec." It also sought to position itself in the tradition of its signifier, "cinema," embracing many of its international currents, including genres:

Il s'agit pour le cinéma des années 80, non pas tant de se démarquer d'une cinématographie inter-

nationale, mais surtout de se marquer au sceau d'un texte filmique élargi qu'est le genre, au sceau d'un langage universel. L'histoire du cinéma québécois ne doit pas s'écrire uniquement au nom d'un signifié qui le singularise : le Québec, mais aussi s'inscrire dans les traces d'un signifiant qui le constitue : le cinéma. Il faut alors plier la différence diégétique québécoise, un cinéma du Même souvent interpellé dans sa québécity, à un référent Autre, la loi du genre – en quelque manière un autre même puisque le genre assemble et fait rassembler.<sup>13</sup>

Many reasons can explain this belated recognition of the significance of genres in Quebec cinema. Among others, the screenplay – long the mortal enemy of direct-cinema practitioners – started being recognized in the 1980s as an essential component of the production. This led to a resurgence of literary adaptations, especially of popular books that could provide richer storylines than most original film scripts.<sup>14</sup> In most cases, filmmakers relied on historical novels with strong emotional appeal. *Les Plouffe* (1981, Gilles Carle), *Maria Chapdelaine* (1983, Carle), *Bonheur d'occasion* (1983, Claude Fournier), *Le Crime d'Ovide Plouffe* (1984, Denys Arcand) and *Le Matou* (1985, Jean Beaudin) are among the best-known adaptations of literary works. Since the 1980s, directors and producers have shed their traditional reluctance to rely on non-filmic sources, as well as their endemic fear that pre-existing texts would hinder their creative freedom.<sup>15</sup>

The early 1980s also saw changes in funding policies. The Institut québécois du cinéma shifted its perspective towards the film industry, moving from the attitude of “social assistance” that had characterized the 1970s to a profit-oriented mindset aspiring to favour the production

of mainstream commercial movies. Law 109, which was passed in 1983 to transform the Institut's mandate and create the Société générale du cinéma québécois (which would morph into the Société générale des industries culturelles in 1988, and later into the Société de développement des entreprises culturelles), established new guidelines for provincial government funding which included success at the box-office as a crucial objective. Furthermore, as Peter Urquhart explains in his chapter on the metamorphosis of the CFDC into Telefilm Canada, federal funding policies also changed at that time. The new policies sought to address both issues of content and problems of distribution.<sup>16</sup> The successful release of *Déclin de l'empire américain* (Denys Arcand) in 1986, followed immediately by *Un zoo la nuit* (1987, Jean-Claude Lauzon), *Jésus de Montréal* (1989, Denys Arcand), *Cruising Bar* (1989, Robert Ménard) and *Dans le ventre du dragon* (1989, Yves Simoneau), and the emergence of Rock Demers's important series of children movies, "Contes pour tous," launched with *La Guerre des tuques* (André Melançon) in 1984, seemed to confirm the merits of the new policies.

Incidentally, the children-cinema genre would deserve an entire chapter of its own. Beyond Demers's "Contes pour tous" films (often directed by André Melançon and Michael Rubbo), one could examine Roger Cantin's *Simon les nuages* (1990), *Matusalem*, (1993) and *La forteresse suspendue*, (2001), Richard Ciupka's *La mystérieuse mademoiselle C.* (2002) and *L'incomparable mademoiselle C.* (2004) and Léa Pool's *The Blue Butterfly* (2004). Furthermore, one could study how producers of children's films in Quebec, like their American colleagues, have developed effective marketing strategies, generally releasing their products just before Christmas and during the summer. It should also be pointed out that funding policies, especially those of the

federal government, have led to a significant increase in the production of English-language genre films in Quebec. These movies (some co-produced with France!) adopt whole-heartedly the Hollywood formulas and are aimed at the international market. However, the English-language film industry in Quebec moves in a significantly different direction from its French-language counterpart. For this reason, I will exclude it from this discussion and simply refer the reader to my article "Le cinéma québécois aux États-Unis a-t-il plus de chance d'être mieux reçu en anglais ?"<sup>17</sup>

Another novelty of the 1980s, which further solidified the dominance of genre films in Quebec, is a change of attitude in the industry towards actors and the "star system." Playwright and stage director, Jean-Claude Germain, published an article in 1984 in which he notes the predominance in our film industry of direct-cinema *auteurs* at the expense of actors and fiction.

Le cinéma québécois n'aime pas les acteurs. C'est un fait. Il aime les cinéastes. Jusque là, pourrait-on dire, rien de plus naturel. Après tout le narcissisme cinéastique est un sentiment tout aussi honorable que la vanité théâtrale. Sauf que les cinéastes québécois ne semblent pas s'aimer eux-mêmes. Du moins en tant que tels. Ce qui est grave. Au point que chaque fois qu'on les interroge en public sur leur métier (ou sur leurs films, ce qui est pire), ils préfèrent la plupart du temps se définir comme des sociologues, des anthropologues [...] mais jamais, au grand jamais, comme des fabricants d'images ou des marchands d'émotions. Bref, comme des cinéastes. [...] Les cinéastes québécois se sont toujours refusés à coiffer le chapeau à large bord de l'homme de spectacle. [...]

J'ai dit plus haut que le cinéma québécois n'aimait pas les acteurs. J'ajouterais maintenant qu'il ne pouvait pas les aimer sans se renier lui-même. Du moins en étant ce qu'il a été jusqu'à tout récemment. Les acteurs sont ceux par qui la fiction arrive.<sup>18</sup>

Although Germain seems to forget that Gilles Carle employed celebrities like Willie Lamothe (*La Mort d'un bûcheron*, 1973) more for their star appeal than for their compliance with the demands of documentary realism, he is right in suggesting that traditionally the actor has been in the shadow of the cineaste in Quebec. But along with other developments since the 1980s, Quebec cinema has become increasingly an "actor's cinema". Marie Tifo, Pierre Curzi, Rémy Girard, Michel Côté, Pascale Bussi res and Pierre Lebeau have all become household names; stars whose fame alone is often enough to attract spectators. Guy A. Lepage's comedy, *Camping sauvage* (2004), makes this point humorously in its opening credits: "Pierre Lebeau, Pascale Bussi res and Michel C  t   ... do not appear in this film. In stead, you'll have to make do with Guy A. Lepage."

Throughout the 1990s, the star system continued to assert its importance in the industry and it has become, along with genres, a central element in the construction of the audience's horizons of expectations. The Quebec star system, evidently different from Hollywood's, relies on an osmotic relationship between film, television, stand up comedy and advertising. Unlike Hollywood stars, whose very status depends on their inaccessibility, Quebec stars are defined by their proximity to the people, by their ordinariness. Consequently, ordinary guys and gals like Isabel Richer, Beno  t Bri  re, Patrick Huard, David Boutin, Luc Picard, Roy Dupuis, Jean-Nicolas Verreault and Serge



Thériault, have become the core of a star system that is used not only to promote commercial films and television shows, but even *auteur* films like *20h17 rue Darling* (2003, Bernard Émond), *Gaz bar blues* (2003, Louis Bélanger), *Jack Paradise* (2004, Gilles Noël) and *Mémoires affectives* (2004, Francis Leclerc).

Like the star system, genres have evolved significantly over the last twenty years. Denys Arcand, for instance, has always used generic conventions in his films. But in the past, he tended to borrow classical rules for the purpose of undermining them in an attempt to question preconceived ideas about individuals, generations and cultures. In his early fictions, *La maudite galette* (1971), *Réjeanne Padovani* (1973) and *Gina*, he used distancing or deconstructive strategies to challenge generic expectations. In later films, however, rather than deconstructing conventions, he adopts them more straightforwardly, anchoring them solidly in a narrative and a *mise en scène* that allow spectators to identify with protagonists.<sup>19</sup> His *Love and Human Remains*, for instance, a dark story unfolding in an anonymous, North American setting, where characters speak in generic English (which has led some critics to deny it its status as a Quebec film) borrows elements from the thriller (Who is the killer? Who will be next?) and the psychological drama (unspoken angst, unrequited love) to create an intriguing *Film Noir* which gains from being seen more than once.

Arcand's changing relationship with generic conventions parallels the changes in Quebec cinema's use of genres in general. While mid-1980s films like *Un zoo la nuit* and *Pouvoir intime* (1986, Yves Simoneau) manipulate the conventions of the whodunit by redirecting the structure of the genre away from the crime story towards questions of filial love, masculinity and homosexuality, mid-1990s gen-

re films rigorously respect traditional parameters, as in *Liste noire* (1995, Jean-Marc Vallée), where the filmmaker un-problematically tells a crime story that exposes corruption in the judicial system. Effective in its plot twists and turns, *Liste noire* remained the most popular Quebec thriller until quite recently, when *Sur le seuil* (2003, Éric Tessier) enjoyed an even bigger success (playing on 70 screens), resulting in great part from the star appeal of Michel Côté and Patrick Huard, the combination of thriller and horror, and the notoriety of Patrick Senécal's original novel in the "para-literary" milieu (horror, sci-fi, thriller etc.) The crime thriller, generally without the element of horror found in *Sur le seuil*,<sup>20</sup> represents the most common genre in Quebec, after comedy. In fact, the thriller often merges with comedy to create entertaining postmodern films such as Roger Cantin's *L'Assassin jouait du trombone* (1991) and *La Vengeance de la femme en noir* (1997).

Both seasoned filmmakers and young cineastes have tried their hands at the thriller. In the first group, we can mention André Melançon, who had been making films since the 1970s and directed *Rafales* in 1990, a heist-gone-wrong drama taking place in the middle of a snow storm, and Michel Poulette, who had been working in television since the mid-80s and directed *La Conciergerie* in 1997. In this film, a cop investigates the death of his immediate superior, whom he saw as a father figure. The investigation leads him to a building where sinister criminals live. However, in a typical generic twist, the real bad guys are high-ranking cops. Richard Ciupka, an experienced cinematographer, used his skills for creating effective visual imagery in his first thriller, *Le dernier souffle* (1999), which follows the complicated relationship between a jaded cop, his brother, who belongs to a rightwing militia, and his father, a former member of the Front de Libération du Québec. Fast-paced and effective

Fast-paced and effective but stylistically conventional, this film deals with the classic Quebec film themes of difficult father-son rapports, elusive national identity and problematic masculinity, and as such recalls Jean-Claude Lauzon's work.

Among the younger filmmakers, Michel Jetté has already established his reputation with two thrillers leaning towards the gangster movie and prison drama. In his first film, *Hochelaga* (2000), he delves into the world of criminal biker gangs, adopting a quasi-anthropological approach that examines the importance of the gang in shaping the identity of the individual, as well as the violent rites of passage that cement the sense of belonging to the group. His second feature, *Histoire de pen* (2002), has fewer "thrills," and focuses primarily on the experience of life in prison. In the tradition of Pierre Falardeau's *Le party* (1990) and, to a lesser extent, Michel Brault's *Les Ordres* (1974), Jetté's film has a surreal edge and tragic overtone that the others lack. As in *Hochelaga*, *Histoire de pen* deals with brutal rites of passage, traumatic loss of innocence, obsessive loyalty to the group, violence, hate and anger as "social norms" within a secluded milieu. Érik Canuel also attracted attention with his first feature, the thriller *La Loi du cochon* (2001), a skilful mix of comedy and suspense where murder, racism, pot plantation, gambling addiction, surrogate motherhood and pig farming merge into a violently clever movie. His second genre film, *Le dernier tunnel* (2004) is in the heist-gone-wrong tradition. A deftly constructed screenplay supported by solid performances by Michel Côté and Jean Lapointe, *Le dernier tunnel* relies more on character relationships than on car chases and stunts to produce its effects and, as is often the case in Quebec cinema, from *Un zoo la nuit* to Arcand's *Les Invasions barbares* (2003), is imbued with Oedipal overtones.

A more formally complex crime thriller was directed by Robert Morin in 1992, *Requiem pour un beau sans-cœur* (1992), in which iconographic conventions of tough bad guys versus jaded cops are respected, while the narrative is constantly re-shaped through subjective strategies of address which shed a nuanced light on the violence of our society. *Quiconque meurt, meurt à douleur* (1998) made a strong impact on Quebec's cinemascap because of its topic (drug and violence), its genre (suspense thriller), its technique (subjective, mobile video camera), its style (documentary-like fiction) and effective performances from non-professional actors. Even more controversial, because of its highly ironic style and its scandalous title, which means "the nigger," *Le Nèg'* (2002) is a whodunit unfolding in a small town ridden with hypocrisy and racism, which recalls Kurosawa's *Rashomon* (1950) with its multiple perspectives, web of contradictions and endless layers of lies. Thus, from the straightforward *Liste noire* to the intricate *Le Nèg'*, the thriller, under its various guises, has undoubtedly matured into one of the cornerstones of the Quebec film industry.

Along side the thriller, some minor genres have also enjoyed a certain degree of success, such as the pirate movies of Roger Cantin, *Matusalem* and *Matusalem II : le dernier des Beauchesne* (1997). Fantasy films, a genre that takes spectators away from their everyday, logical world, destabilizes them, and throws them into an irrational universe, have also been produced since the late 1970s. Generally, they have avoided the expensive special effects that characterize the genre in large film industries, using instead simple devices to represent an environment that defies the physical limitations of our concrete milieu. Gilles Carle's *L'Ange et la femme* (1977) and *Fantastica* (1980) are two early instances of this genre. The first is a good example of a fantasy film where the effects are produced

tasy film where the effects are produced without recourse to expensive machinery. Here we encounter an angel who can resurrect the dead, and one of those whom he has brought back to life. The second is a musical in which it is nature that is distorted and rendered unreal. Carle's films were poorly received: some accused him of turning his back on Quebec nationalism; others, who read them through the lens of auteur criticism rather than as fantasy films, found them banal and clichéd. Furthermore, the long-standing realist tradition of Quebec cinema made it difficult for many to accept these stories which sought to emancipate people from the limits of the real. But ten years later, Yves Simoneau enjoyed much more success with *Dans le ventre du dragon*, which takes place in the mysterious underbelly of a pharmaceutical company where a mad scientist conducts improbable research. Fantasy merges with comedy in the scenes starring Rémy Girard and Michel Côté as two bumbling idiots caught in a situation far too complex for their limited intellectual abilities. Manon Briand's art film *La Turbulence des fluides* (2002) also incorporates elements of the fantasy genre, with events that science cannot explain, especially the sudden disappearance and equally sudden reappearance of tides in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. Briand, however, does not fully adopt the conventions of the genre, as the film remains firmly anchored in typical *auteur* cinema themes of love, death and angst, which are resolved within the limits of the realistic mode. Kim Nguyen's *Le Marais* (2002) remains closer to pure fantasy with its bizarre murder mystery taking place in a dreamy, uncanny 19<sup>th</sup>-century Eastern Europe peopled with weirdoes and freaks.

More common than fantasy, historical films date back to the 1940s (ex. *Un homme et son péché*) and have consistently continued to be produced throughout the 1960s

(ex. *Astataïon ou le Festin des morts*) and 70s (ex. *Kamouraska*, 1973, Claude Jutra; *J.A. Martin, photographe*, 1977, Jean Beaudin) when few genre films were made. The use of the past in film can raise certain questions: is it a contemporary rethinking of a past situation or a reconstruction of an event; why use stories from the past rather than from the present; is the past seen as the source of a true identity that is now perceived as having disappeared? Answers to these questions tend to separate films into two broad categories: one category tackles the past to understand its impact on the present; the other looks back at French Canadian history to appeal to the pleasures of nostalgia and *dépaysement*. In the first category, belong more or less socio-political films like *Les Tisserands du pouvoir* (1988, Claude Fournier), *Quand je serai parti... vous vivrez encore* (1999, Michel Brault) and *15 février 1839* (2000 Pierre Falardeau). In the second, we find exercises in nostalgia like *Les Portes tournantes* (1988, Francis Mankiewicz) and *The Red Violin* (1998 François Girard). Closely related to the nostalgic historical film are historical melodramas, often based on old movies or TV shows, like *Séraphin - Un homme et son péché* (2002, Charles Binamé), the top-grossing film in the history of Quebec cinema, *Le Survenant* (2005, Éric Canuel) and *Aurore* (2005, Luc Dionne).

But regardless of the constancy of the historical film and popularity of the thriller, there is no doubt that *the* central genre of the Quebec film industry is comedy. Humour is perhaps one of the most deeply distinctive practices of Quebec culture and the dominance of comedy might very well translate the need of Francophones to assert their originality and specificity. This humour is based on contrasts between two systems or modes of behaviours. Among other things, comedy relies on class oppositions, where petit-bourgeois good taste is displaced by low-brow,

coarse jokes and pratfalls verging on vaudeville and slapstick.

Extremely popular in the early 1970s, often an essential ingredient of the sexploitative “films de fesses” of Fournier and Héroux, comedy disappeared briefly in the late 1970s and early 1980s, but came back with a vengeance in 1989 with *Cruising Bar*. More a succession of amusing skits than a structured narrative, *Cruising Bar* stars Michel Côté playing four different men, from different classes, who are all trying to seduce women. Typically, the working class displays a healthy potency while the upper class is flaccid; while the coarse, unsophisticated car salesman enjoys sex with a succession of ladies in a suburban dancehall, the smooth, slick yuppie, who frequents posh downtown nightclubs, proves to be impotent in the end. After the success of *Cruising Bar*, the top-grossing Quebec film of the 1980s,<sup>21</sup> there has been virtually one memorable comedy every year. 1990 saw *Ding et Dong le film* (1990, Alain Chartrand), starring the comic duo Ding (Serge Thériault) and Dong (Claude Meunier), who enjoyed a huge cult following on television. *Amoureux fou* (Robert Ménard), a skillful romantic comedy with an element of drama, came the following year. Gilles Carle, whose *Les Mâles* (1970) had been part of the first wave of successful comedies, tried in vain to recapture his past glory with *La Postière* (1992) and *Pudding chômeur* (1996). George Milhalka, who made genre films in English (including his horror classic *My Bloody Valentine*, 1980), directed two hit comedies in French, *La Florida* (1993) and *L’Homme idéal* (1996). Denys Arcand also directed a little-known comedy, the bitter-sweet *Joyeux calvaire* (1996), which recalls Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* (1953) with its two vagabonds walking through Montreal in search of an elusive friend. Perhaps the best among all these is *Louis 19 le roi des ondes* (1994) directed by Michel

Poulette and written by Émile Gaudreault, which stars Martin Drainville in his typical role as a little working-class fellow, who is suddenly thrown in the middle of a media circus when he agrees to have his life broadcast on television 24 hours a day. Well-written and acted, *Louis 19* is one of the few comedies of the 90s to strike a balance between laugh-out-loud gags and a thoughtful commentary on reality TV and the effects of American media on marginal cultures and individual identities. This is perhaps why it had the rare “privilege” of being remade in Hollywood as *Edtv* (Ron Howard, 1999).

*Louis 19*'s critique of the media pales before the radical politics of Pierre Falardeau and Julien Poulin, who have created the Elvis Gratton trilogy: *Elvis Gratton, le film* (1985), *Elvis Gratton 2 : Miracle à Memphis* (1999) and *Elvis Gratton XXX : Le retour d'Elvis Wong* (2004). Here, coarse humour is used to draw a caustic caricature of the grotesque Bob Gratton, a federalist who vocally said “NON” to Quebec sovereignty at the 1980 referendum. Irrevocably colonized, he is blinded by the American dream and alienated from his own culture. The first *Elvis Gratton* mixed humour and political commentary<sup>22</sup> in a way that is not foreign to the genre, which has historically been used to convey serious ideological issues through amusing sarcasm (Chaplin's *Great Dictator* [1940] is but one famous example). Produced shortly after the first referendum, the original film pointedly decried Quebec's inferiority complex before the U.S. and its inability to assert its identity in the face of assimilatory federalism. In the later instalments, however, Falardeau and Poulin's utter contempt for those who do not share their point of view transforms humour into derision. Their total lack of subtlety in exposing the “quétainerie” (tackiness) of a middle-aged middle-class



that is indifferent to Quebec's nationalist cause turns parody into obscenity.

As is the case with *Elvis Gratton*, many comedies that first appear as self-contained features spawn sequels that try to capitalize on their initial success. Louis Saïa's *Les Boys* (1997) for instance, led to three other instalments (*Les Boys II*, 1998; *Les Boys III*, 2001; *Les Boys IV*, 2005). The title of this tetralogy, about a group of average Joes playing amateur hockey, suggests the camaraderie that unites these men of all backgrounds and social classes. Car mechanics, lawyers, real-estate agents, head-banging rock musicians, doctors, actors all come together as a cohesive group on ice, thus reproducing the myth of a consensual Quebec culture – a myth encouraged by the Parti québécois government in power at the time the first three films were released. The opposing side, here, is *ethnically* Other, especially in *Les Boys II* where the boys play teams from around the world. Beyond politics, however, the success of the four films rests in great part on its focus on masculinity (covering issues ranging from fatherhood to homosexuality) as it projects the image of ordinary French-Canadian men who succeed against all odds. Female characters are systematically subordinated to the needs of the masculinist narrative. At the opposite end of the spectrum, Denise Filiatrault's *C't'a ton tour Laura Cadieux* (1998) focuses on a world of women. Produced by Denise Robert and Daniel Louis of Cinémaginaire,<sup>23</sup> *Laura Cadieux* was sixty-five-year-old Filiatrault's first feature, although she had been an actress and stage director for years. Based on Michel Tremblay's 1973 novel (a lengthy monologue in fact), it revolves around over-weight, working-class Laura, played by Ginette Reno, and her friends who gossip, bicker, scream at their bratty kids and fantasize about men. The success of *C't'a ton tour Laura Cadieux* generated, of course,

a sequel, *Laura Cadieux... la suite* (Denise Filiatrault, 1999), and even a television series, "Le petit monde de Laura Cadieux" (2003).<sup>24</sup> Filiatrault tried her hand at fantasy with the adult fairytale *L'Odyssée d'Alice Tremblay* (2002), which brings together an impressive line up of famous actors, but failed to impress both the public and the critics. Cinémaginaire also produced Émile Gaudreault's *Nuit de noces* (2001) and *Mambo Italiano* (2003). The latter is a sort of gay Italian *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* (Joel Zwick, 2002), based on the hit play by Steve Galluccio.

Max Films, Roger Frappier's production company, first enjoyed commercial success with a comedy in 1990, when *Ding et Dong le film* topped the box office charts, and later with Jean-Philippe Duval's *Matroni et moi* (1999), about the conflict between an intellectual and a mafioso, *La Vie après l'amour* (2000), about the break up of a couple, and Sébastien Rose's *Comment ma mère accoucha de moi durant sa ménopause* (2003), about masculine angst in a world dominated by women. But Max Film's biggest hit has been Jean-François Pouliot's *La grande séduction* (2003), which merges the masculine camaraderie of *Les Boys* and the assertive energy of *Laura Cadieux's* female community over the bleak background of chronic unemployment in an isolated region. Even if Frappier has a quasi monopoly on first features by young cineastes (in addition to Duval's, Rose's and Pouliot's first films, he also produced first features by Denis Villeneuve and Manon Briand), and allows them to experiment a bit within the generic limits of comedy, there are other young filmmakers who have produced successful comedies with smaller companies. Ricardo Trogi's *Québec-Montréal* (2002) was produced by Go films and Louis Bélanger's *Gaz bar blues* by Les Productions 23 and the Coop vidéo de Montréal.

In these comedies, as well as other genres, filmmakers do not strictly follow generic conventions, often borrowing from two or three different traditions. Texts are always hybrids of other texts, and if this hybridism is acknowledged, if the mergers and deformations of conventions are recognized, understood by both the filmmakers and the public, then various levels of reading can be achieved. But there remains a limit to hybridization beyond which the very notion of genre collapses. In Quebec, comedy has proved most successful in providing solid parameters for hybridization.<sup>25</sup> Comedy allows to broaden the scope and alter the nature of more strictly delineated genres. In the early 1970s, comedy managed to “de-eroticize” soft-core erotica. In the 1990s, it gave a unique Québécois character to the horror genre, which remains rare in our cinema. The horror spoof in Quebec is often ironically subversive (Gabriel Pelletier’s *Karmina* [1996] and *K2* [2001]) rather than being merely a caricature or a pastiche.

As this survey makes abundantly clear, over the last twenty years genre film production has been dominated by a younger generation of cineastes. While directors from previous generations had learned their craft through documentary and transferred this sensibility to fiction filmmaking, younger cineastes started by making commercials and television shows, and thus developed a knack for telling meaningful stories, with polished visuals, fluid camera movements and rhythmic editing. They have little interest in long, static shots, raw aesthetics, and minimalist acting. Furthermore, while most Quebec filmmakers continue to write their own screenplays, a few screenwriters have started to acquire a strong reputation as genre specialists, like Joanne Arseneau and Ken Scott. And in fact, an increasing number of directors do not write their scripts.

Because of the commercial success of several Quebec genre films, funding agencies have become increasingly prone to support those films that are likely to make a profit. Telefilm, for instance, introduced in October 2000 a controversial "performance window," based on previous box office receipt. Producers find this reward system essential "pour assurer la continuité dans la création, tout comme l'aide sélective est essentielle pour assurer les œuvres des créateurs."<sup>26</sup> But cineastes find that such a practice runs the risk of narrowing the scope of Quebec cinema. In an open letter to Telefilm,<sup>27</sup> twenty-five directors urged the government agency to sustain cultural and creative diversity in filmmaking by supporting less commercial, more risky ventures, warning Telefilm bureaucrats that the cutthroat logic of the market can seriously undermine the future of our national cinema by financing products that only aim to reach as broad an audience as possible, like TV does, regardless of cultural and artistic value. Production companies, these directors fear, will become less willing to take risks with eccentric films that might not earn them performance premiums.

It is true that the films most likely to earn premiums are genre films, which are potentially more formulaic and less creative than *auteur* films. Consequently, genre films become more likely to be produced and certainly more likely to receive aggressive marketing campaigns for, if some financially promising films are hyped according to the Hollywood model, less commercial works receive little or no promotional support. Television adds, huge posters in Montreal metro stations, billboards alongside highways, no effort is spared to attract audiences to films like *Séraphin*, *Les Boys* and *La grande séduction*, all of which drew more than one million spectators within months of their release.<sup>28</sup> Distribution on DVD is also becoming an increas-

ingly important part of the Quebec film business. There is doubtlessly a risk that Quebec cinema will come to value itself exclusively in terms of profit. While some of the top-grossing films in Quebec were also artistic achievements, others were clearly less accomplished. On the one hand, producers often aim for the lowest common denominator to appeal to the largest possible fraction of the population. On the other hand, a national cinema cannot grow only on the basis of the arcane masterpieces of a genius admired by fifteen cinéphiles. A diversified film output, which includes both box office hits and more challenging *auteur* films, is clearly the most viable option.

Since 2000, Quebec cinema seems to have reached a certain equilibrium, where *auteur* films can thrive alongside commercially successful genre movies, with home-made productions earning over 20% of the box office in Quebec, and reaching an extraordinary 26% in 2005<sup>29</sup> (few countries in the world ever manage to do better than this against the global Hollywood steamroller). What is most significant is that commercial success is not limited to facile genre films. Even *auteur* films, by both “masters” like Arcand and lesser-known directors like Jean-Marc Vallée, whose idiosyncratic *C.R.A.Z.Y.* (2005) won praises across English-Canada, sometimes can prove quite lucrative indeed. But to this day, few films have managed to be *at once* popular hits and critical successes. For most critics, the ideal Quebec cinema is anti-establishment and subversive – almost by definition non-commercially successful. This leads French Canadian critics, unlike their American counterparts, to avoid evaluating films in terms of their success as genre films. They discuss instead their realism, their degree of “québécoisité.” A genre film is, by definition, inferior. For them, Gilles Carle’s fantasy films are thus necessarily mediocre when compared with “great Carle master-

pieces" like *La vraie nature de Bernadette* (1972), and certain moments of Arcand's career (i.e. *Gina*, *Love and Human remains* etc.) are deemed to be unfortunate mistakes.

For some, making genre films means undermining cinema as an artistic form. For others (sometimes the same ones actually) the rise of genres translates Quebec cinema's attempt to be in synch with the rest of the world<sup>30</sup> and represents a betrayal of the documentary tradition from which it stemmed. "True" Quebec fiction films should ignore genre cinema, the enemy of genuine *auteur* cinema. But isn't this too narrow a definition of Quebec cinema? Isn't it simplistic to see genre films and *auteur* cinema as mutually exclusive? Aren't there many directors who manage to find a balance between the economic realities of film production and their interest in personal and cultural expression, formal and narrative experimentation? As Diane Burgess points out in her chapter on the Pacific New Wave, young *auteurs* from British Columbia seem to have come to terms with the tensions at the core of film making as an art form *and* an industry. Surely French-Canadian filmmakers can do the same. But in Quebec, commercial cinema still has many detractors. They see all genres as stereotypical imitations of Hollywood. For them, filmmakers should demarcate themselves from such influences and focus instead on those distinct cultural attributes that make Quebec unique. When Pierre Barrette writes that genre films only plant "au milieu d'un décor québécois des personnages, des thèmes et des motifs tout droit sortis du cinéma de genre américain" or that Quebec comedies are only « des clones parfaits de l'humour sans relief et sans poids de Hollywood », <sup>31</sup> doesn't he just rehash the old 1970s argument that any film that does not emphasize aesthetic innovation and French Canadian language is nothing more than an American car with a body re-built in

Quebec?<sup>32</sup> Some critics use a similar argument against filmmakers who borrow techniques and practices from television. Cinema loses its soul when it stoops to the level of television and starts sharing its fixation on ratings.

To be faire, genre films *do* stem from a conception of cinema as an industry that must meet the expectations of consumers. Genre films recognize themselves from the start as cultural commodities, they consciously seek to standardise cinema and, as such, there is always a risk that they will favour commerce at the expense of art. Similarly, film funding policies that promote exclusively genres can easily undercut any attempt by *auteurs* to create a valid national cinema (Canadian or Québécois). Genres *are* transnational and trans-historical. They thrive on intercultural appropriations, they always borrow the conventions of the Other (generally the American Other) and in the process can erase national and cultural distinctions. They *can* threaten the uniqueness and originality of a type of Quebec cinema that endeavours to convey an exclusive national and cultural ideology. The argument here is that if you take a given Quebec film where French Canadian actors could be replaced by Hollywood stars, Montreal could seamlessly be transformed into Chicago, and the actions depicted are not distinctly Québécois, then that Quebec film is, in fact, an American film. The same argument has been applied to other cultural and economic aspects of Quebec history, where “imported” models, no matter how successful, have been debated and contested.

Genres *do* operate on the basis of imported filmic codes, pre-established stylistic conventions, generic categories of subjects and especially character types. Cultural and national identities are not an *a priori* in genre films. In theory, Michel Côté in *Sur le seuil* could be replaced by Tom Hanks, as they play similar trans-cultural character types.

While all this is true, it is also true that these rules and conventions can be interpreted and used differently by different filmmakers with different backgrounds. Quebec culture is drenched in American culture, and filmmakers who choose to make genre films manifestly borrow from the pre-existing Hollywood "texts" in a gesture that asserts their belonging to North America, that asserts their "américanité."<sup>33</sup> Nonetheless, they know how to appropriate and transform these pre-determined forms and adapt them to their own cultural context and economic circumstances. And spectators can *immediately* tell the difference. As much as all genre films tell similar stories with similar characters, the narrative context of the Quebec genre film, with characters that speak in a familiar language, display recognizable attitudes, move in a well-known geography, remains as distinctive as any *auteur* film. There is no doubt that Quebec spectators recognize themselves most readily in genre films. Keeping in mind Jauss's concept of horizons of expectations,<sup>34</sup> it would be hard to explain how our cinema could be so popular if it did not meet Quebec people's expectations. These expectations are in great part shaped by a "foreign" cinema, but they are also shaped by the everyday context in which spectators live. Quebec audiences manifestly enjoy a certain type of Quebec "cinema of attractions" that doesn't shy away from the pleasures of spectacle. One must then ask what sort of pleasure does the Québécois spectator experience when watching a Quebec genre film.

Self recognition is important but it is not enough, and it might even hinder spectatorial pleasure. Unlike most *auteur* films, genre movies adopt an aesthetic of transparency, using continuity editing along with linear narrative and techniques of identification, and implicitly accepting the ideology of individual success conveyed by



such practices. This is the opposite of the “ideal” *auteur* cinema which denies identification with a hero and focuses on failure, victimisation, “misérabilisme,” defeatism and marginality.<sup>35</sup> These might offer a more accurate portrait of Quebec culture, but also go against the need of spectators to enjoy victory, success and hope vicariously. Unlike popular culture, which prefers identification to distancing, classicist *cinéphilie* promotes the latter over the former, but in the process ignores the fundamental importance of emotions for the spectator. For a film to reach its audience there must be a broad intersection between the discursive system of the work and the tastes, habits and horizons of expectations of the public. And at the centre of these expectations lies the viewer’s desire to respond to diegetic situations that generate emotional effects. As Francesco Casetti<sup>36</sup> suggests, the popular film hails its spectators, gives them a place, and takes them along a given trajectory. But the spectators must be willing to be taken along for the ride; the ride must elicit the emotions and thrills that they expect to experience. The kinds of films whose invitation spectators accept – comedies, thrillers, melodramas – thus mirror more accurately than *auteur* films the passions and aspirations of French Canadians, as well as their fears and anxieties. Screenplays for popular films might be “ripped from the headlines,” in touch with flavour-of-the-week trends, or might be based on a distant historical event thus displacing contemporary concerns. Either way, they remain an integral part of the society that produces them and which they, in turn, re-produce. Furthermore, scholars should remember that if cinema can reflect society and history, impose a certain form upon shapeless existence, and delve into the recesses of our psyches, it also fulfills our profound, visceral need to cry, to laugh, to be scared, to be excited, to be transported into an

imaginary world that triggers emotions, gives us pleasure and entertains us. Even the most escapist of comedies still tells us something about what it is we are so desperately trying to escape.

The point of this essay is not to reject the cinema that has rightfully been celebrated for its distinctive thematic and aesthetic qualities or to negate the accomplishments of singular *auteurs*. Rather than wanting to exclude these films, I am in fact, not unlike many of the contributors to this collection, pleading for a more *inclusive* approach to film studies. This is a plea for an approach that is pragmatic, free from nationalist or aesthetic prejudices, which includes all those filmic practices that are part of Quebec's own forms of collective expressions and that give cinema a "normal" place in society whereby it can actually reach the audience it is meant to address. This approach talks about and talks *to* audiences, to bring them back to the forefront and, yes, theorize their tastes whatever they may be. Quebec cinema does not exist to confirm some vague theory about what it should be; it exists because cineastes make films in Quebec and Quebec spectators go see them.

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Jean-Yves Croteau, Pierre Véronneau eds. *Répertoire des séries, feuilletons et téléromans québécois de 1952 à 1992*. Québec : Les Publications du Québec, 1993. 692p. Translation: "Fast food for the imagination, junk, prostitution, slimy mediocrity, production meant to be idolized, mental atrophy, mentally retarded spectators."

<sup>2</sup> *Le cinéma québécois à la recherche d'un public. Bilan d'une décennie : 1970-1980*. Montréal : Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 1982. 164p.

<sup>3</sup> "Confusion des genres", *La Presse*, 6 March, 2004, p. Cinéma-4. Translation: "It is time for genre films to be taken seriously in Quebec, whether it's comedy, romance, fantasy or historical films. For 20 years or more, we have been fed 'auteur films', some are good, but others are morbidly boring. I think it is possible to make meaningful films that are also entertaining."

<sup>4</sup> *Pour une esthétique du cinéma québécois*, (Département de littérature comparée, Université de Montréal, January 1997) 144. Translation: "Quebec cinema is non-generic. Rather than relying on pre-existing modes of enunciation – this or that genre – Quebec filmmakers always remain on the threshold of enunciation, where the utterance is always in the process of being constituted."

<sup>5</sup> It was the case for Pierre Patry and Bernard Devlin.

<sup>6</sup> While Dansereau's film was officially produced as a fiction feature by the NFB, Carle's was originally intended as a documentary. However, the filmmaker "misappropriated" the funds to turn the project into a fiction.

<sup>7</sup> The creation of a fullfledged francophone production unit at the NFB in 1964 did not satisfy everyone. Many continued to leave the Board throughout the 1960s, some only temporarily, others permanently. Denys Arcand, Bernard Gosselin, Jean Dansereau, Gilles Groulx and Michel Brault left in 1965 to create Cinéastes associés (1965), while Gilles Carle and Arthur Lamothe chose to work independently.

<sup>8</sup> Pierre Pageau, "A Survey of Commercial Cinema : 1963-1977," *Self Portrait: Essays on the Canadian and Quebec Cinemas*, eds. Pierre Véronneau and Piers Handling (Ottawa: Canadian Film Institute, 1980) 157.

<sup>9</sup> "Gina was not invited to any festival, everyone hated it," said Arcand in an interview, "People who praised *Réjeanne Padovani* [1973] were shocked by *Gina*. The director of the New York Film Festival, Richard Roud, found it atrocious. Yet it was my biggest financial success of the 1970s in Quebec." André Loiselle "'I only know where I come from, not where I am going': a conversation with Denys Arcand," *Auteur/Provocateur: The Films of Denys Arcand*, eds. Loiselle and Brian McIlroy (Westport: Praeger, 1995) 145.

<sup>10</sup> Actually, the success of Cronenberg's film in its French dubbed version, under the title *Frissons*, was such that the producers changed the origin-

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al English-language title from *The Parasite Murders* to *Shivers* in an attempt to reproduce in English Canada the success it enjoyed in Quebec. See Peter Morris, *David Cronenberg: A Delicate Balance* (Toronto: ECW Press, 1994) 68.

<sup>11</sup> Peter Harcourt cited in Morris, 71.

<sup>12</sup> Michel Euvrard, "Quand la mer se retire...", in "Aujourd'hui le cinéma québécois," ed. Louise Carrière (Paris, *CinémAction*, 40, 1986) p.27-34. Euvrard, suffering from typical post-1980-referendum intellectual depression concludes his piece by saying: "Le cinéma québécois est plus varié, plus 'normal' (au risque de devenir plus 'normalisé'); mais il monte aussi de ses profondeurs des cris involontaires de peur et d'effroi, C'est un cinéma de transition pour un pays de nouveau et plus que jamais incertain." Translation: "Quebec cinema is more diversified, more 'normal' (on the verge of becoming 'normalized'); but from its depths emerge unconscious signs of fear and dread. It is a cinema of transition in synch with a nation that is again, and more than ever before, uncertain of its future."

<sup>13</sup> Denis Bellemare, "Genre et abandon : l'exemple de *Kalamazoo* » in *Le cinéma québécois des années 80*, eds. Claude Chabot, Michel Larouche, Denise Pérusse, Pierre Véronneau (Montréal, Cinémathèque québécoise, 1989) 122-123. Translation: "For 1980s Quebec cinema, it is not a matter of emulating, or distinguishing itself from, international cinema. Rather it seeks to position itself within a broader mode of filmmaking, the genre, a more universal mode. Quebec film history cannot be limited to its signified – Quebec – it must also inscribe itself within the continuity of its signifier – cinema. The diegetic difference of Quebec cinema, often explicitly conveyed through 'québécoisité' or 'Quebecness,' is then subordinated to rules from elsewhere – generic conventions. These conventions dictate how to put together in order to bring together."

<sup>14</sup> Pierre Véronneau, "Attraction fatale et originalité : quand la littérature québécoise se fait du cinéma," in *Africa, America, Asia, Australia*, 20 (1997) 15-36.

<sup>15</sup> On this, see François Gagnon's conclusion to his chapter in "Histoire de l'adaptation filmique," in *Cinéma et littérature au Québec : rencontres médiatiques*, ed. Michel Larouche (Montreal: XYZ Éditeur 2003) 181. "L'adaptation, au Québec, est un outil permanent du cinéma. Son histoire montre qu'elle est loin d'être monolithique. L'adaptation étonne par son omniprésence et son caractère prolifique. Aussi, elle ne semble pas menacée d'extinction. La quantité d'adaptations est au prorata du nombre de réalisations : plus il y a de films réalisés au Québec, plus il y a d'adaptations." Translation: "Adaptation in Quebec cinema has been a permanent tool. Its history shows its diversity. It is omnipresent and prolific, and is in no way likely to disappear. The number of adaptations reflects directly the number of films produced: more films, more adaptations."

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<sup>16</sup> See Stephen Roth and Marie-José Raymond's report *Le cinéma au Canada, sur un bon pied*, which they wrote for the federal government and points out marketing problems at the national level.

<sup>17</sup> "Le cinéma québécois aux États-Unis a-t-il plus de chance d'être mieux reçu en anglais?" *Cinémas*, 7:3 (spring 1997) 81-118. Very few Quebec scholars discuss commercial English-language production in Quebec, even if many films are produced by Francophone filmmakers.

<sup>18</sup> "Fais pas l'acteur!," in special issue "Vivre à l'écran. Propos sur le métier d'acteur," *Copie Zéro*, no 22 (October 1984): 10-13. Translation: "Quebec cinema doesn't like actors. It's a fact. But it likes filmmakers. Perhaps, it's just natural. After all, 'cinematic narcissism' is no worse than theatrical vanity. However, Quebec filmmakers, as 'filmmakers,' don't actually seem to like themselves much either. And that is a serious problem. Whenever they are interviewed about themselves or, worse, their films, they always define themselves as sociologists or anthropologists, but never, ever, as filmmakers, namely, people who make movies that appeal to the spectator's emotions. [...] Quebec filmmakers never represent themselves as showmen. [...] I said earlier that Quebec cinema doesn't like actors. Now I would add that it *could* not like actors without negating what it is or, at least, what it has been until quite recently. Because actors bring with them fiction."

<sup>19</sup> It is important to note, however, that in all of his films, Arcand rejects the narrow focus on one character that certain genres favour. He prefers ensembles, groups of individuals that can convey a complex tapestry of psychological contradictions. There is no such thing as a "secondary character" in his films. He prefers "cameo appearances" through which individuals with few lines and few actions can still have an existence of their own not exclusively subordinated to the main character.

<sup>20</sup> This combination of thriller and horror has been, ever since Cronenberg made his first commercial films in Montreal, primarily associated with English-language production. Spoofs, such as Gabriel Pelletier's *Karmina* (1996) and *Karmina 2 : l'enfer de Chabot* (2001), are more the forte of Francophone directors. *Le diable est parmi nous* (Jean Beaudin, 1972) is generally recognized as the first French Canadian horror film. Of course, given its early 1970s context, when sexploitation films dominated the market, it contains a fair dose of nudity.

<sup>21</sup> See Appendix.

<sup>22</sup> One should note, however, that the press kit and publicity campaign emphasized the comedic aspect of the film and ignored its politics. One actually wonders if its message was ultimately understood by the public.

<sup>23</sup> Cinémaginaire is particularly associated with Denys Arcand, as all of his films from *Montréal vu par...* (1991) to *Invasions barbares* (2003) have been produced by this company. As already mentioned, Arcand has always played with generic conventions but never realises "pure" genre films. *Invasions*

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*barbares*, for instance, is part comedy of manners, part political satire and part oedipal melodrama.

<sup>24</sup> Filiatrault is also well-known for the light comedies she stages as part of the “Just for Laugh” festival.

<sup>25</sup> This is not unique to Quebec. Through film history, comedy has been merged with virtually every other genre.

<sup>26</sup> Roger Frappier, Richard Goudreau, Lorraine Richard, Denise Robert, Nicole Robert, Claude Veillet, “Le succès pénalisé,” *La Presse*, 3 Feb. 2004, A15. Translation: “To ensure continuity in creation, the same way selective aid is essential to promote creativity.” While the producers support the performance premium, they also complain that premiums to Quebec films will be reduced by 32% in order to increase premiums to English Canadian films, which lag far behind Francophone productions in terms of box-office receipt. For instance, according to the English-language film magazine *Take One*, the top 6 Canadian films at the box office in 2003 were Quebec films. David Cronenberg’s *Spider* was the top grossing non-Quebec Canadian film at number 7 on the list. See Wyndham Wise, “*Take One*’s 2003 survey of Canadian Cinema,” *Take One* 45 (march-June 2004) 49.

<sup>27</sup> “Lettre ouverte à Téléfilm Canada. Vingt-cinq cinéastes en colère,” *Ciné-TV-Multimédia*, no 3245, 22 Jan. 2003.

<sup>28</sup> But hype is no guarantee of success as was demonstrated by the 2002 flop of Louis Saïa’s *Les Dangeureux*, which received almost \$3 million in performance premiums. Success seems more accurately measured in terms of attendance than money, since box-office comparisons must involve monetary conversion factors through time.

<sup>29</sup> Kate Taylor, “Quebec’s up. English Canada? Never Mind,” *The Globe and Mail* 30 Dec 2005, p. R3

<sup>30</sup> See the book *Le Cinéma québécois à l’heure internationale*, Montréal, Stanké, 1990. It is a collection of interviews by Marie-Christine Abel, André Giguère and Luc Perreault, with photos by Daniel Kieffer.

<sup>31</sup> “Le genre et la différence,” *24 images*, 110, page 37. Translation: “genre films only plant in the middle of a Quebec setting characters, themes and motives that come straight out of American genre films. Quebec comedies are only clones of flat Hollywood-style humour.”

<sup>32</sup> To push this metaphor a bit further, one could ask if it isn’t better to build a car that works, that drivers will appreciate and buy, or to subsidize the production of cars that fall apart and that no one wants to drive. The argument of the American car in a Quebec body recalls the African-American metaphor of the Oreo Cookie: black outside, white inside; hard outside, soft inside.

<sup>33</sup> See Sylvie Groulx’s *À l’ombre d’Hollywood* (2000). Here is the NFB’s summary of the film: “The world of cinema is undergoing another massive transformation. Forget the talkies, forget post-war neo-realism, forget film noir, new wave, world cinema ... the new millennium is all about huge

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entertainment complexes that overwhelm us with sensory bombardment. *In the Shadow of Hollywood* examines this assault on our senses through interviews with directors, producers, writers and other experts in the film industry. Notable figures such as Arthur Penn, Bertrand Tavernier, Alain Tanner, Agnieszka Holland, Marin Karmitz, Denys Arcand, Margarethe von Trotta, Andrzej Wajda and Milos Forman speak out with passion and humour, acceptance, indignation, discouragement and hope. The questions addressed are 1) How did the movies become a strategic American industry whose goal is dominance of the world's screens? 2) How have American films captured the imagination of audiences the world over? 3) Considering the Hollywood penchant for happy endings, is it still possible to create films that are 'great art'?"

<sup>34</sup> See Hans Robert Jauss, *Pour une esthétique de la réception*. Paris: Gallimard, 1978.

<sup>35</sup> This point is made by Ginette Major in her argument about a Quebec cinema that has lost its audience. Do these characteristics of auteur cinema still exist today?

<sup>36</sup> *D'un regard à l'autre : le film et son spectateur*. Lyon: Presses universitaires de Lyon, 1990.





## CHAPTER 5

### **Air Bud and Stickgirl Share Leaky Condo: The Changing Landscape of B.C. Cinema since the 1980s.**

**Diane Burgess**  
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“You’re constantly choosing content over money. If I choose to work with Bruce Sweeney I may lose a week on ‘The X-Files’. You lose a week on ‘The X-Files’ that’s going to support you for nine months but you’re doing what you love. And it’s not to say that you can’t do work you love when you’re working for the Americans or on a television series but you’ve got to know from the very beginning that you’re not featured. I mean, those are lucky breaks and they really live in the realm of economics, you know, they have nothing to do with art.”<sup>1</sup> (Babz Chula)

Discussion of the co-existence of foreign location production with indigenous filmmaking in British Columbia seems to lend itself more easily to anecdote than

analysis. For example, Mike Gasher begins his book *Hollywood North: The Feature Film Industry in British Columbia* (2002) with reminiscences of watching big budget movies in which he strained to recognize friends, one a lanky monster in *Prophecy* (1979, John Frankenheimer), another clad in animal skins in *The Clan of the Cave Bear* (1986, Michael Chapman);<sup>2</sup> meanwhile, in *Dreaming in the Rain: How Vancouver Became Hollywood North by Northwest* (2003), David Spaner relates an exchange of “contemptuous” glares between Sylvester Stallone and Bruce Sweeney at a local post-production sound facility.<sup>3</sup> In each instance there is a titillating brush with celebrity that fails to arouse suitable excitement in the participants while also serving to draw a significant distinction between two different approaches to making films on the west coast. Gasher describes his own early experiences with Hollywood runaway productions as “nothing we were prepared to take seriously,” noting that “for the most part, real cinema took place elsewhere.”<sup>4</sup> Similarly, in the re-telling of Sweeney’s anecdote, there is no sense of the ambivalence that necessarily characterizes the relationship between the service and independent sectors.

Although the tensions between art and industry already discussed in this anthology emerge with clarity, unacknowledged questions remain concerning the impact of the transnationalization of Hollywood on the presence of skilled labour, production facilities and policy incentives in B.C. In other words, had Stallone and his predecessors not made forays north of the border (how) would indigenous cinema have developed in this province? My intention here is not to suggest that the interdependence of divergent sectors of film production can be reduced to a series of causal relationships, but rather to draw attention to certain discursive conditions that inform examinations of

global Hollywood in a national context. Runaway productions, with their links to the cult of celebrity, retreat into absence as examinations of Canadian cinema move further away from either popular discourse or political economy and toward a more conventional national cinema framework. Even with the inclusion of references to the transnational reach of Hollywood, it is possible to note the maintenance of boundaries between art and industry, or high and low cinematic culture.

Challenging the rigid boundaries of Canadian film criticism, Geoff Pevere expands “conventional definitions of distinctly Canadian [...] cultural activity,”<sup>5</sup> to consider the “extra-national impact” of above-the-line talent. While recognition of the transnational contributions of Jim Carrey, Lorne Michaels and James Cameron feeds an insatiably insecure nationalism, it overlooks those who crossed the border into Canada and proceeded to influence indigenous filmmaking. For instance, Stephen J. Cannell’s “production exodus into Canada” in the 1980’s prompted his American colleagues to refer to him negatively as “Stephen J. Canada.”<sup>6</sup> Since the 1980s, the landscape of B.C. cinema has undergone several key changes that have culminated in the relatively recent growth of an active domestic production sector. In particular, a Vancouver community focussed on narrative feature filmmaking has evolved to overtake strong regional traditions in experimental film, animation and documentary. New voices continue to emerge both in socially committed documentary, including Mark Achbar (co-director of *Manufacturing Consent, The Corporation*), and animation. As part of a diverse body of work that encompasses and blends documentary, avant-garde and animation, Ann Marie Fleming’s “whimsical yet trenchant stick-figure cartoons”<sup>7</sup> offer micro-glimpses of her alter ego Stickgirl’s self-conscious

musings (*I Love My Work* [1998], *Great Expectations* [1994]) as well as pointedly ironic commentaries on gender politics (*My Boyfriend Gave Me Peaches* [1994], *AMF's Tiresias* [1998]).

### **Border Jumpers**

Yet, it is developments in the feature film industry, and especially the “Pacific New Wave” —to echo the term used by Brenda Longfellow in this anthology to chronicle the rise of Toronto filmmakers over the last twenty years—that provide the impetus for a regional re-examination of the national cinema framework. Specifically, an examination of the B.C. film industry demonstrates that the overarching category of English Canadian cinema subsumes disparate regional experiences that tend to comprise rival intra-national jurisdictions, under one umbrella. As a starting point, Gasher’s attempted rejection of the national cinema model provides insight into alternative means of mapping this terrain. Gasher’s book considers the political economy of the B.C. film industry, paying particular attention to the significant presence of foreign location production and the unique characteristics of regional development. This approach acknowledges connections between inter- and intra-national forces and the emergence of a local film scene. Yet, when the focus shifts to an examination of differing depictions of place in foreign and indigenous films, binaries re-enter the discussion as Gasher ultimately invokes a hierarchy of value based on the extent to which B.C. appears as a “heterogeneous, multidimensional space in and of itself.”<sup>8</sup> From the use of Vancouver as generic setting in films like *Bird on a Wire* (1990, John Badham) through indigenous features like *Air Bud* (1997, Charles Martin Smith) that mimic American styles and locales,<sup>9</sup> Gasher notes “Hollywood’s

hegemony in the commercial film industry."<sup>10</sup> Consequently, regardless of the degree of complicity with Hollywood's imperialist impulses, or the extent to which these impulses may have "enabled a local cinema to emerge,"<sup>11</sup> the recognition of distinctive indigenous expression implies that it is desirable to resist the power of a hegemonic other.

Similarly, although Spaner acknowledges the connectedness of Vancouver's service sector and indie scene, the use of evaluative language sets up a clear opposition between the two. Babz Chula's reference to the economic sacrifice involved in forgoing a week on "The X-Files" in order to work on a Bruce Sweeney film highlights the split between creative and material needs.<sup>12</sup> In describing the impact of Canadian cinema on her career, Molly Parker cites the ability to access roles that are "infinitely more interesting to me than the kind of work I see most actors that I know living in L.A. pursuing."<sup>13</sup> Prior to the surge in Vancouver independent production during the late 1990's, Parker notes that "the only work was doing shitty American television."<sup>14</sup> Over the course of his rather colloquial history of the Vancouver film scene, Spaner places emphasis on the city's cultural milieu, ranging from the counter-culture of the 1960s through punk in the 1980s to the vibrant film community at the University of British Columbia in the early 1990s; in each instance, the blending of an overpowering mainstream commercial industry with a passionate enthusiasm for alternative artistic pursuits creates a context which attracts and fosters creative talent.

On one hand, Spaner's book celebrates the growth of a thriving independent scene that exists "in stark contrast to [...] the city's U.S.-based service industry."<sup>15</sup> For example, Chula relates fond memories of her experiences working on Sandy Wilson's debut feature *My American*

*Cousin* (1985), shot in Penticton, even though several of her colleagues from *The Accused* (1988, Jonathan Kaplan) thought the finished product was “hokey.”<sup>16</sup> Thus, despite lauding the artistic achievements of indigenous filmmakers, Spaner’s commentary offers a concurrent sense of participation in a continental popular cinema culture that recalls Geoff Pevere’s arguments in “Ghostbusting: 100 Years of Canadian Cinema, or Why My Canada Includes *The Terminator*.” With lists of actors “who exchanged B.C. for Hollywood in the 1950s and 1960s”<sup>17</sup> as well as “those who left B.C. to try Hollywood in the 1970s and 1980s,”<sup>18</sup> *Dreaming in the Rain* reclaims expatriates, thereby drawing attention to “the creeping Canadianization of popular culture.”<sup>19</sup> Meanwhile, the identification of disguised Vancouver locales,<sup>20</sup> actors in service productions<sup>21</sup> and “memorable US shoots in B.C.”<sup>22</sup> “facilitates a distinct reception of US culture” for local viewers.<sup>23</sup> As part of his consideration of the potential viewing pleasures offered by branch plant productions, Charles Acland cites the referencing of the Alberta location in ads for the Calgary broadcast of an American television movie; yet, as Acland points out, this recognition of the pleasures of polysemy “is hardly a form of resistance or subversion.”<sup>24</sup>

Indeed, Spaner’s delineation of Vancouver’s participation in the global film and television industry may have less to do with expanding the frame of national cinema than with accessing popular discourses of fandom. The accumulation of extra-textual information that allows fans to locate hidden meanings contravenes “the dominant culture’s need to maintain the disciplinary distance between text and reader.”<sup>25</sup> Within this formulation, Vancouver gains star power through connections to Hollywood (and its attendant connotations of fame, glamour and even notoriety) that ultimately function as a type of

cultural capital. After all, knowing the details of Errol Flynn's untimely death at Vancouver General Hospital in 1959<sup>26</sup> has more to do with the pathological pursuit of the cult of celebrity than with the discriminating tastes of international art cinema critics. Hierarchies of cultural currency are more strictly policed in William Beard and Jerry White's anthology *North of Everything: English-Canadian Cinema Since 1980*. With the book's title, the editors "(perhaps inadvertently) position Hollywood as a structuring absence...[in that] it is, by implication, the 'everything' that lies to the south;"<sup>27</sup> the symmetry between English Canada's struggling feature film industry and Louis L'Amour's "metaphor for 'dead'"<sup>28</sup> may be intended as a sly wink to the challenge of containing the rich variety of cultural practice that fills the volume. However, as Susan Hayward cautions, invoking the binary of Hollywood/other "reduces the idea of a national cinema to economies of scale and therefore to one concept of *value*: namely, economic wellbeing."<sup>29</sup>

Although *North of Everything* embraces a "heterogeneity of critical styles and a diversity of critical perspective,"<sup>30</sup> the range of filmmaking under consideration is more firmly bounded. The international political economy of filmmaking enters into Charles Acland's examination of "Screen Space, Screen Time and Canadian Film Exhibition" and Jacqueline Levitin's contribution, "Deepa Mehta as Transnational Filmmaker, or You Can't Go Home Again," while the anthology's introduction sidesteps these issues. This is likely a good thing though, as the breadth of Canadian filmmaking, from the advent of the National Film Board's Studio One (which became the Aboriginal Filmmaking Program in 1996) through the continuing legacy of the avant-garde, risks being overwhelmed by the predominant focus of the national policy

agenda on increasing the domestic share of box office revenues. Nevertheless, in the process of delimiting the boundaries of their study of English Canadian cinema, Beard and White outline a methodological framework with a distinctly internalist focus. Despite their decision to “separate the nation-state from the national cinema”<sup>31</sup> as a means of endorsing the two cinemas model of Canadian film history, they persist in using the nation’s borders as a container for their object of study. Philip Schlesinger explains that a correspondence between the scope of the study of national cinemas and social communication theory’s “overwhelming concern with the interior of the national communicative space”<sup>32</sup> fails to account adequately for the “border-circumventing flows” of globalized information technologies.<sup>33</sup>

### **Sub-National Jurisdictions**

As such, the national cinema framework advanced by Beard and White stops short of addressing “the new wave of concern with global interconnectedness.”<sup>34</sup> Instead, placing English Canadian cinema “north of everything” reinforces both a centre/hinterland perspective and the notion of a bounded national space, while enforcing the relative absence of the foreign locations industry from Canadian film studies. Gasher positions the B.C. film industry at the intersection of “a complex weave of regional, national, and transnational social, political, and economic relations.”<sup>35</sup> In particular, he links the juridical delineation of regional cinema to “Victoria’s long-term regional industrial development strategy”<sup>36</sup> noting that the provincial government’s interests were “industrial rather than cultural.”<sup>37</sup> Specific early projects included fire safety and reforestation films produced by the Forest Service and the theatrically released *Beautiful British Columbia* (1941) from



the Travel Bureau.<sup>38</sup> In 1977, Grace McCarthy set up the province's first film development office,<sup>39</sup> which would subsequently become the British Columbia Film Commission (BCFC); originally part of Ministry of Tourism, the BCFC currently operates under the auspices of the Marketing, Investment and Trade portfolio of the Liberal government's Ministry of Small Business and Economic Development. With its motto "B.C. produces," the Film Commission facilitates locations management through scouting assistance and guidelines for accessing a range of permits and tax credits, thereby serving as a "gateway to film production in British Columbia."<sup>40</sup>

Alongside this transnational participation in Hollywood's outsourcing, Gasher notes the relative marginalization of B.C.'s film industry vis à vis the concentration of production companies, distributors and resources within the central Canadian triangle of Montreal, Toronto and Ottawa.<sup>41</sup> With the head offices of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and National Film Board located in Toronto and Montreal respectively, regional producers have often found themselves at the mercy of the administrative re-structuring that has accompanied the ebb of federal funding for these cultural institutions. Furthermore, in a 1997 public notice filed with the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC), the B.C. Motion Picture Association (BCMPA) argues that "'inequities in the delivery of federal government funding have caused the concentration of such funding to be regionalised in Ontario and Quebec to the detriment of the British Columbia film community;'"<sup>42</sup> Telefilm Canada emerges as the main target with references made to declining contributions from the Feature Film Fund during the mid-1990s as well as a proportionally lower share of funds from the new Canadian Television and Ca-

ble Production Fund.<sup>43</sup> As a result, B.C. faces inter-provincial competition both to attract federal resources and to maintain a stake in the lucrative business of hosting runaway productions; while Vancouver and Toronto vie to be "North America's third largest centre of film and television production,"<sup>44</sup> the former has consistently placed ahead of its eastern Canadian rival on *MovieMaker Magazine's* list of the top locations for independent filmmakers.<sup>45</sup>

The criteria for *MovieMaker's* "unscientific study" include talent base, facilities and quality of life; Toronto received a lower ranking due to a competitive environment that makes it comparatively more difficult to complete a project there.<sup>46</sup> In 1998, the provincial government launched Film Incentive British Columbia (FIBC), a program of three tax incentives designed "to increase investment activity in the domestic industry."<sup>47</sup> Administered by B.C. Film, FIBC is a refundable corporate income tax credit that allows B.C.-controlled production companies to claim 30% of eligible labour costs up to a limit, per taxation year, of 48% of total production costs;<sup>48</sup> additional components of the program comprise regional and training incentives. Along with the requirement of a minimum of 6 out of 10 Canadian content points on the CAVCO (Canadian Audio-Visual Certification Office) scale, eligibility rules stipulate the percentages of expenditures and principal photography that must occur in the province. A note at the end of the FIBC overview explains that "special rules apply for inter-provincial and treaty co-productions."<sup>49</sup> Thus, the process of coordinating production activity between provinces begins to resemble the legal characteristics of negotiating proportional financial, technical and creative contributions with foreign countries; in each instance, proportional contributions allow eligible co-

productions to take advantage of incentives in both jurisdictions by virtue of gaining “domestic” status.

B.C. Film’s tax credit programs are comparable to those found in other provinces. For example, the Ontario Media Development Corporation (OMDC) administers the Ontario Film and Television Tax Credit (OFTTC) which offers a refundable tax credit for 30% of eligible labour expenditures by an Ontario-controlled production company;<sup>50</sup> much like FIBC, the OFTTC stipulates minimum requirements for percentages of principal photography and expenditures that must occur in the province and allows for a regional bonus for shooting outside of Greater Toronto. At the federal level, these tax credits can be combined with the 25% Canadian Film or Video Production Tax Credit (CPTC), which is administered by CAVCO and the Canadian Customs and Revenue Agency (CCRA). Alternatively, Canadian or foreign-owned production companies may qualify for the Ontario Production Services Tax Credit (OPSTC) which provides a refundable tax credit of 18% of eligible Ontario labour expenditures; British Columbia’s equivalent to this service sector incentive is the Production Services Tax Credit (PSTC). In contrast to FIBC and the OFTTC, the production services incentives are intended to stimulate the locations industry. Each of these provincial tax credits can be combined with the 16% Canadian Film or Video Production Services Tax Credit.

Gasher explains that B.C. introduced its PSTC four months after Ontario’s Production Services Tax Credit as a means of levelling the playing field; otherwise, according to a Coopers & Lybrand survey, an estimated “65 percent of foreign film and TV producers working in British Columbia would ‘very likely’ relocate” to take advantage of greater tax incentives in Ontario.<sup>51</sup> Similarly, the B.C. government’s 2005 boost of tax credit rates followed on the

heels of increases in both Ontario and Quebec. A week after changes were announced in Ontario, Quebec's service sector tax credit was raised to 20% (2 points higher than Ontario's new rate); the province's domestic tax credit remained at 29%.<sup>52</sup> A few weeks later, faced with mounting pressure from production companies threatening to shift big budget U.S. shoots to central Canada, B.C.'s finance minister announced tax credit changes that would match the increased rates in Ontario.<sup>53</sup>

As a complement to federal programs, B.C. Film introduced a Feature Film Fund in 2000, following the Minister of Canadian Heritage's announcement of the Canada Feature Film Fund.<sup>54</sup> This type of provincial equity investment aims to leverage additional funding from both private investors and the federal government. In B.C. Film's 2002/03 Annual Report, their review of the first two years of the production fund finds that "[e]very dollar invested by British Columbia Film leveraged \$6.81 from private investors and \$7.62 from federal government sources. Every dollar invested by British Columbia Film triggered \$6.63 from the Canada Feature Film Fund."<sup>55</sup> Prior to the creation of B.C. Film in 1987, "the predominance of foreign location production [...] left the industry exceedingly vulnerable to fluctuations in the currency-exchange rate."<sup>56</sup> Of particular importance to the evolution of cultural policy in British Columbia was the necessity of re-dressing this imbalance by developing the indigenous production sector. As such, a stress on principles such as leveraging and diversification arises from a need to stabilize and protect industrial concerns.

Gasher asserts that the complexities of B.C.'s relationship to Hollywood and central Canada "serve to distance west coast filmmaking from the notion of cinema as the product of a national culture."<sup>57</sup> The value of his preference for Doreen Massey's concept of "place as an intersection or meeting place" lies in an external focus that can account for the articulation of social and economic relations that pay little heed to borders.<sup>58</sup> Although this model is useful for examining the unique characteristics of the transnational locations industry, and indeed successfully manages to "decouple state and nation,"<sup>59</sup> it is not ultimately post-national. A persistent, or perhaps pernicious, nationalist perspective appears in Gasher's interpretation of the differing ways in which filmmakers represent British Columbia as place;<sup>60</sup> despite earlier references to films like *Air Bud*, *The Grocer's Wife* (1991, John Pozer) and *Kissed* (1996, Lynne Stopkewich) that have either imprecise or inaccurate locations, his distinction between service and indigenous productions boils down to local resistance of Hollywood's hegemony over depictions of place. Finally, in an attempt to deflect the charge of parochialism, Gasher points out that areas of correspondence might be found between B.C.'s unique characteristics and the growing "transnational circuit of film production" across Canada.<sup>61</sup> While a comparison of the Ontario Film Office's online digital catalogue, "Picture Perfect," with B.C. Film Commission's "A World of Looks"<sup>62</sup> would provide insight into the promotional efforts of the locations industry, there is potentially even more to be gained through a comparative study of the rise of indigenous production in these sub-national jurisdictions.

## Pacific New Wave

In his history of west coast filmmaking, included in the original *Self Portrait*, Tony Reif explains that “there has never been a strong fictional tradition in Vancouver film, and though several interesting attempts have been made, the lack of learning situations for scripting and direction is a severe handicap.”<sup>63</sup> Reif’s assessment applies to B.C. cinema from its inception through 1980, and, aside from the pioneering efforts of Larry Kent, Sylvia Spring, Jack Darcus and Zale Dalen, there were few narrative films to mention. Spurred on by the B.C. Film Commission, foreign location production steadily increased while the construction of the North Shore Studios in the mid-1980s had a profound impact on Vancouver’s service industry. Even so, British Columbia arrived rather late on the national cultural policy scene. Although the establishment of B.C. Film came shortly after the creation of production development offices in Alberta, Quebec and Ontario,<sup>64</sup> Gasher notes that the province did not have a comprehensive cultural policy until the 1995 NDP government;<sup>65</sup> consequently the B.C. Arts Council was created 32 years after the Ontario Council for the Arts and 49 years after Alberta’s Cultural Development Branch.<sup>66</sup> With an industrial infrastructure in place, and continued improvements to policy incentives in the mid-1990s, there was an upsurge in indigenous filmmaking in B.C. at the turn of the millennium.

In many ways, the Pacific New Wave was fostered by conditions similar to those that preceded the Toronto New Wave in the late 1980s, as explained by Longfellow and others. Increases in production facilities and skilled personnel in Ontario can be attributed to the advent of Canadian broadcasting and the tax shelter boom in the film industry. Michael Dorland traces the origins of the

American hold on the Canadian television market, explaining that the 55% Canadian content minimum set by the Board of Broadcast Governors in 1959 “‘actually reflected about the limit of what the CBC’s English service could achieve.’”<sup>67</sup> Along with a reliance on imported American network product and Hollywood telefilms, CBC also acquired nationally produced programming from subsidiaries that had been set up in Canada over the course of the 1950s.<sup>68</sup> In 1959, a *Toronto Daily Star* columnist noted that the lacklustre performance of indigenous feature filmmakers provided a “‘sharp contrast [to] the buoyant situation of the television filming industry where U.S. money and know-how is turning Toronto into one of the world’s largest production centres’”<sup>69</sup> According to Manjunath Pendakur, “[t]he Canadian service sector—laboratories, studios, hotels, equipment rental—were the major beneficiaries” of the tax shelter boom in the late 1970’s.<sup>70</sup> With the 1974 increase of the Capital Cost Allowance (CCA) to a 100% tax deduction for Canadian films, an influx of investment sparked a sharp increase in production, with a focus on films that would appeal to the lucrative (North) American mainstream market.

Yet, in examining the breakdown of costs for certified productions, Pendakur notes that Canadian key creative personnel received less than foreign workers when the CCA boom peaked in 1979;<sup>71</sup> this discrepancy can be attributed to a tendency to rely on more experienced American creative talent while hiring Canadians “‘simply to lend their names to the credits in order to comply with the CCA rules.’”<sup>72</sup> Even though indigenous talent may have encountered limited opportunities for creative development during the tax shelter years, this period saw the concentration of Canadian feature filmmaking “‘in the Montreal-Ottawa-Toronto triangle [...which] accounted

for at least 90 percent of the country's production."<sup>73</sup> Faced with a small domestic market, Canadian producers could minimize risk and expenditures if they converged on this established service infrastructure, thereby highlighting the significance of agglomeration to the survival of the industry. In addition to benefiting from proximity to relevant services and facilities, producers relied on a diversified slate that included "at least two non-theatrical sectors" such as commercials or documentaries.<sup>74</sup> For independent feature filmmakers, the final pieces of the puzzle were the creation of the Ontario Film Development Corporation (OFDC) in 1986 and the launch of Perspective Canada at the Toronto Festival of Festivals in 1984.<sup>75</sup> Geoff Pevere argues that the OFDC's decision to focus on lower-budget, artistically-driven projects can be linked to the aftermath of the CCA which saw large investments yield "substandard knock-offs of American commercial fodder" that rarely received theatrical distribution.<sup>76</sup> Finally, for young directors like Atom Egoyan, Patricia Rozema and Bruce McDonald, Perspective Canada's new annual showcase would provide them with "credibility, visibility and status" on a national and international stage.<sup>77</sup>

Meanwhile, in Vancouver during the mid-1980s, the construction of the North Shore Studios comprised a major step in developing a service infrastructure. At a cost of \$25 million, and consisting of a ten building compound located just across the Second Narrows Bridge from downtown, the new facility would be "the largest studio ever built in Canada;"<sup>78</sup> Vancouver Film Studios would eclipse Lions Gate Studios (which North Shore Studios was re-named following its sale in 1997) as the country's largest multi sound stage facility in the late 1990s.<sup>79</sup> As a joint venture between L.A. writer-producer



Stephen J. Cannell and Paul Bronfman of Toronto-based Comweb, the North Shore Studios project received a “\$4.3 million loan from the B.C. government” to help with construction. Prior to the Studios’ official opening in 1989, Cannell Production’s episodic series, which included “21 Jump Street” and “Wiseguy,” were shot in warehouse space in Chinatown.<sup>80</sup> The following year saw the announcement of a \$1.25 million sound mixing studio in North Vancouver that would be owned by Paul Sharpe and Jacqueline Cristianni; Sharpe Studios would receive \$567,000 in federal and provincial government assistance and would make it possible to complete a final sound mix on a feature film without leaving Vancouver.<sup>81</sup> Local actor Jay Brazeau attributes regular on-screen work to the arrival of the North Shore Studios, noting that “a lot of technicians and actors learned their trades on those shows;” this job security in turn “enabled Brazeau to work in low-budget B.C.-grown films such as *Kissed*, *Live Bait* and *No-roc* for B.C. directors.”<sup>82</sup>

The blending of service work with homegrown productions is exemplified by Brightlight Pictures Inc. which is currently “one of the biggest employers of crews and occupants of studio space in B.C.”<sup>83</sup> With projects such as *House of the Dead* (2003, Uwe Boll; based on a Sega video game), *Going the Distance* (2004, Mark Griffiths; A MuchMusic Production), *Last Wedding* (2001, Bruce Sweeney), *Punch* (2002, Guy Bennett), and “Alienated” (an episodic series produced for CHUM Ltd.’s Space: The Imagination Station), Brightlight possesses a diversified production slate spread “over the service, co-production and proprietary realms, so as not to be caught by the vicissitudes of any one stream of business.”<sup>84</sup> Bringing together different, yet complementary, backgrounds, Brightlight was founded in 2001 by Stephen Hegyes, a graduate

of UBC's film program where he produced *Double Happiness* (1994, Mina Shum), and Shawn Williamson, a long-time producer in the local service industry. In fact, reading their biographies, which are posted side by side on the company's website, provides an accurate picture of the hybrid nature of film production in Vancouver—Hegyes' cites several prestigious international festivals as well as work with local indie directors like Sweeney, Shum and Stopkewich while Williamson's provides a snapshot of the transnational locations industry accompanied by a listing of prominent celebrities such as Elijah Wood (*Try Seventeen*), Kevin Spacey (*Edison*), and Michael Keaton (*White Noise*).<sup>85</sup>

In a January 2004 overview of the state of the B.C. film industry, Ian Edwards mentions Screen Siren Pictures along with Brightlight as part of "the new guard."<sup>86</sup> Although Edwards does not explicitly define the term, B.C. Film President Rob Egan's reference to "'weathering the storm'" of a recent downturn in production or Williamson's comment about the "need for greater business savvy in this market," suggest that long-term success may lie with a diversified approach that combines independent filmmaking with service work and non-theatrical production.<sup>87</sup> Founded in 1997 by producer Trish Dolman, who was joined by partners Lean Mallen and Stephanie Symns in 2001, Screen Siren "focuses on creating high-quality, innovative documentaries and dramatic film and television."<sup>88</sup> Their debut feature, *Flower & Garnet* (2002, Keith Behrman), screened for eleven weeks in Vancouver and received the Claude Jutra Award for Best Direction of a First Feature Film at the 2003 Genies. On the television front, their slate includes "Girl Racers," a series for Global Television about female race car drivers, and "The Score," an adaptation for CBC's *Opening Night* of the Electric

Company's award winning theatrical production.

In a decidedly more non-theatrical vein, "animation and live-action production company" Global Mechanic specializes in "multi-media commercials, independent films and music videos."<sup>89</sup> The co-owners of the company's west coast studio, which was launched in 2000, are Ann Marie Fleming and Bruce Alcock. Among Fleming's recent projects are the award-winning *Blue Skies* (2002), a short film about the continuing significance of artistic expression in the aftermath of 9-11, and *The Magical Life of Long Tack Sam* (2003), an innovative feature documentary which blends animation with archival footage to tell the story of her great-grandfather, a renowned Vaudevillian acrobat and magician. Alcock's commercial reel includes "Sick Day," the first spot in Bell Mobility's pixel art campaign, and "Pavement" in which the layering of 25 sequences yields multiple blue-tinted hands deftly steering a Mini Cooper. Brightlight, Screen Siren and Global Mechanic represent companies that emerged from a thriving B.C. film industry which reached its peak in 2000 with \$1.18 billion in total production activity, "the largest level of production across Canada."<sup>90</sup>

As with the Toronto New Wave, a rise in local independent production evolved within a conducive cultural policy environment. One of the objectives of the 1986 Audley report, commissioned by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs, Recreation and Culture, was "to determine whether Victoria could take steps to substantially increase the share of Canadian production carried out by B.C. producers."<sup>91</sup> Gasher outlines the extent to which "Audley's recommendations were largely endorsed by a new Social Credit government [...which] unveiled the Film Development Society of British Columbia (B.C. Film) in September 1987."<sup>92</sup> Although production topped \$200

million by 1989, growth occurred largely in the foreign sector and with domestic episodic television.<sup>93</sup> In their 1998-1999 Annual Report, B.C. Film continues to attribute the largest gains to television, citing in particular two new prime time national dramatic series.<sup>94</sup> Even so, domestic production had increased by 76% to \$363.2 million (a 100% increase from 1996 levels) while the foreign sector enjoyed only a modest increase of 5% (23% since 1996).<sup>95</sup> In considering the steady growth in television production, it is important to keep in mind the 1996 introduction of the Canadian Television and Cable Production Fund.

B.C. Film's funding programs have met with continuing improvements in terms of their ability to trigger additional financing. In 1998/99, "each \$1.00 of British Columbia Film funding leveraged \$4.11 of federal funds from Telefilm, the National Film Board, and other federal sources,"<sup>96</sup> while by 2000/01, this amount had risen to \$10.03;<sup>97</sup> B.C. Film's annual information regarding proportional investments only incorporates the contributions of FIBC on projects that received direct funding support from the Society and otherwise does not include tax credit data. Over the years, internal reviews, changes to federal and provincial policies and increasing demand have brought more refinement to the Society's funding programs. In 1998/99, demand outstripped the resources of the Market Incentive Program (MIP), causing the Society to draw on reserve funds to fulfill application requests.<sup>98</sup> The subsequent replacement of MIP by the Television and Film Financing Program (TFFP) also involved a switch from a system of automatic grants based on objective eligibility criteria to a system of recoupable development advances and equity investments that combined eligibility requirements with subjective adjudication.<sup>99</sup> With an additional injection of funds aimed to lever equity invest-

ment from the new Canada Feature Film Fund, the B.C. Feature Film Fund supported a record 11 projects in 2001-02 (up from 3 the previous fiscal year) for a total of \$1,438,756 (up from \$450,000).<sup>100</sup>

### **“Beautiful” British Columbia**

Thus, the number of B.C. produced features peaked the year after the province’s production volumes reached their highest point to date. However, the total spending on film and television production in British Columbia dipped below the billion dollar mark in 2002 (to \$993.6 million) for first time since 1998 (when the total spent was \$807.9 million). The sharpest decrease occurred in Canadian-controlled productions which fell to \$163.6 million in 2002 from their record high of \$419.4 million in 2000; foreign spending declined only slightly for the first time in 2002 to \$830 million from \$856.9 million the previous year.<sup>101</sup> Pevere argues that the Toronto New Wave amounts to “more than mere labelmaking”<sup>102</sup> not only due to the quantity of innovative work that was being produced but also because the films represent “a reaction to and a break from” the type of filmmaking practice that was fostered by the CCA tax shelter.<sup>103</sup> This formulation becomes problematic in the Western Canadian context though, as the Pacific New Wave comprises more of an arrival on the national scene than a break with past practice—unless these low-budget films are considered to be in opposition to episodic television or participation in transnational location productions. Even so, the notion of “a break or reaction” overlooks the value of seeking continuities with the work of filmmakers like Sandy Wilson and Phillip Borsos who carved out a space for themselves in the 1980s alongside an overwhelming foreign presence.

After all, regardless of Pevere’s acknowledgement

of the box office success of films like *Shivers* (1975) and *Rabid* (1977), David Cronenberg has endured a tenuous relationship with canonical status; in particular, Canadian critical outcry concerning the public funding of a horror movie about sex parasites positioned the director on the wrong side of “culture wars” that erected an essentialist battle line between lowbrow American commercialism and the loftier pursuits of Canadian cinema.<sup>104</sup> Nonetheless, while a schismatic approach with respect to indigenous traditions might prove counterproductive, it would be worthwhile to examine significant distinctions between this new batch of debut features and service productions. The use of the label Pacific New Wave originates with Cori Howard’s *National Post* article about two “anti-blockbusters,” *Johnny* (1999, Carl Bessai) and *Noroc* (1999, Marc Retailleau), which draw inspiration from Lars von Trier and Thomas Vinterberg’s 1995 Dogme Vow of Chastity;<sup>105</sup> specifically, Carl Bessai tells Howard of his plans to re-locate from Toronto to Vancouver “to work with other independent filmmakers on a post-dogma trend [...that] he calls ‘the Pacific New Wave.’”<sup>106</sup> The following year, *Georgia Straight* film critic Ken Eisner labels the work of “a new wave of local filmmakers” with the headline “New Realism,” noting that the films share “uncommon grit, not to mention rampant dysfunction and drug use [...] all in a doggedly naturalistic setting.”<sup>107</sup>

Spaner traces what he calls the “West Coast Wave” back to 1989 when “something remarkable happened at the University of British Columbia.”<sup>108</sup> A group of film students, including Bruce Sweeney, Lynne Stopkewich, Mina Shum, Ross Weber and Reg Harkema, whose later work would form the core of the New Wave, collaborated on fellow student John Pozer’s directorial debut; the crew of *The Grocer’s Wife* also included future cinematographer

Greg Middleton and future producer and Brightlight co-founder Stephen Hegyes. *The Grocer's Wife*, shot in the small town of Trail B.C., netted Pozer the inaugural Claude Jutra Award at the 1993 Genies; and, at the 1991 Toronto Festival of Festivals, Atom Egoyan gave his \$25,000 prize for *The Adjuster* to Pozer, in effect paying forward a similar gesture from Wim Wenders.<sup>109</sup> According to Pevere, Wenders' recognition of *Family Viewing* demonstrated "the importance of Canadians securing some off-shore support to maintain artistic survival at home."<sup>110</sup> The notion that "scenes are defined in relation to other scenes"<sup>111</sup> finds a nice symmetry in the acknowledgement of emerging western Canadian talent by the progenitor of Ontario's New Wave. Mark Peranson's assertion, from the national platform of the *Globe and Mail*, that Sweeney's newly acquired A-list status along with the selection of *Last Wedding* "as the first B.C. film ever to open [the] trendsetting" Toronto International Film Festival may lend legitimacy to the west coast indie scene.<sup>112</sup>

Furthermore, in highlighting *The Grocer's Wife* as the defining moment for the West Coast Wave, Spaner manages to account for the existence of a vibrant community that nurtured artistic talent in much the same way as Longfellow and Cameron Bailey identify the Liaison of Independent Filmmakers of Toronto (LIFT) as a key locus where "young wannabes could become complete filmmakers."<sup>113</sup> Even though isolating UBC as a formative environment and first meeting place for many of the indie scene's key players might be convenient from a historiographic perspective, it is important not to overlook the contributions of Simon Fraser University's School for the Contemporary Arts whose alumni include Bruce Spangler, Andrew Currie, Scott Smith and John Dippong. Bailey's description of the gathering of Toronto directors as "a

kitchen party,” complete with sly metaphors that hint at thematic concerns and relative positioning within the New Wave,<sup>114</sup> takes on an ironic inflection when considered alongside Gary Burns’ Vancouver-shot film of the same name. While Ontario’s auteurs populate their films with detached protagonists “living within a geographical vacuum,”<sup>115</sup> their B.C. counterparts situate the highly dysfunctional connections of friends and family in Vancouver’s ambivalent urban milieu; as such, the dissonance of Vancouver’s breathtaking vistas recalls how a manicured carpet symbolized the epitome of a suburban veneer that could not be maintained when the boundary of the kitchen party was breached.

Bailey characterizes the Toronto New Wave as “urban, intimate, underdog, migrant. Educated and art-fuelled. Not political. Not commercial. And not literary.”<sup>116</sup> Meanwhile, a “similar delineation of the Pacific New Wave would be urban, educated, ensemble-driven, political, local, neo-realist, ambivalent, digital, fragmented, and certainly not commercial.”<sup>117</sup> Yet, it would also be worthwhile to consider the continuing relevance of Reif’s 1980 assessment that “Vancouver’s directors [...] move uneasily between the personal and the public, and tend to celebrate quirky, individual resistance as the only possible, meaningful act.”<sup>118</sup> Consequently, the independent film scene of late 1990s Vancouver can be defined in relation to both the emergence of an art cinema movement in Toronto in the 1980s and the roots of feature filmmaking in British Columbia. Reif explains that moments of social criticism in films like *Madeleine Is...* (1971, Sylvia Spring), *Wolfpen Principle* (1974, Jack Darcus) or *Skip Tracer* (1977, Zale Dalen) tend to be couched in fantasy, humour or hopelessly limited potential such that their impact is less than wholeheartedly progressive.<sup>119</sup> In the films of



the late 1990s, the blurring of personal and public realms manifests as rampant dysfunction and can be cued by incursions by or on the family. Acts of individual resistance are definitely quirky in Sweeney's films while, at other times, they meet limitations imposed by the nuances of a neo-realist perspective.

Marc Retaillieu's debut feature *Noroc* (which means "good luck") offers a multi-layered critique of the value and integrity of art that extends to the aesthetic and final status of the production itself. The Dogme manifesto calls for a focus on the truth of characters and setting, thereby privileging the moment over the work as a whole. Shot on digital, *Noroc* conforms with most of the tenets of Dogme 1995's Vow of Chastity, including naturalistic on-location recording of both image and sound.<sup>120</sup> Within the narrative, Petru (Peter LaCroix) is an immigrant Romanian photographer who faces deportation if he doesn't find employment in his field. While working as a security guard at a shipyard, Petru befriends an idealistic sculptor, Halina (Gina Chiarelli), and a struggling painter named Frank (Alan C. Peterson). In order to appease Immigration authorities, Petru reluctantly takes Halina's advice and allows Frank's sleazy art dealer to showcase his photographs; earlier he had vowed never to sell the pictures of the atrocities that he witnessed in his homeland. However, when it is revealed that the exhibit actually comprises candid shots from the shipyard, as well as some rather intimate photos of Halina, Petru's friends are outraged to see their private moments on display. Also at stake is the fate of the historic shipyard, the artists' home, which a heritage group tries to protect from developers; in an interesting parallel, Versatile Shipyards, *Noroc's* setting and Retaillieu's temporary home, was also a popular location for big budget Hollywood features.<sup>121</sup>

As Petru departs the shipyard alone, it is unclear what he could have done to alter his luck; Halina's decision to never sell her sculptures doesn't seem like a viable alternative, particularly given that the warehouse where she lives and works has been sold to developers by the end of the film. *Rollercoaster* (1999, Scott Smith) provides a similarly ambiguous conclusion following Darrin's (Kett Turton) suicide. Over the course of the film, five disenfranchised teenagers seek a brief respite from their group home by taking over an abandoned amusement park, all the while knowing that the morning will bring a suicide pact; paradoxically however, "the most likely of the characters to commit suicide is the one who emerges strengthened."<sup>122</sup> Robin Wood's apt description of the longshot of Stick atop the wood-frame rollercoaster as a "fusion of visual beauty, precariousness, and imminent disaster"<sup>123</sup> extends to encapsulate the types of scenarios encountered by these protagonists. As the teenagers drive out of the park, first Justin (Brent Glenen) and then Stick (Brendan Fletcher) exit the car, acknowledging to each other the difficult uncertainty of their future. In the darkly comedic *Last Wedding*, Noah (Benjamin Ratner), a waterproofing specialist, ironically finds himself living in a leaky condo with his new wife, Zipporah, an aspiring country rock singer and avid collector of equine tchotchkes. As their perpetually dysfunctional relationship becomes increasingly violent, Noah literally flees his marriage and ends up cowering in a motel closet, hiding from his crowbar-wielding wife.

Unfortunately, they disregarded the recommendation from Zippy's mother (Babz Chula) that they postpone the wedding, which despite its tactless delivery proves to be good advice. Prior to the ceremony, Ben (Jay Brazeau) attempts to allay his son's pre-wedding jitters by

pointing out that his own 35 year marriage has brought him 7 or 8 "excellent...well, very good" years, and that there had only been one really bad year, involving an STD of dubious origin. Family also instigates dysfunction for *Live Bait's* (1995, Sweeney) Trevor (Tom Scholte), a twenty-something virgin who feels trapped at home as a witness of his parents' disintegrating marriage. He finds escape via a romantic entanglement with Charlotte (Micki Maunsell), an eccentric golden-aged sculptor with whom he embarks on a search for a salvaged cement mixer that, unbeknownst to Trevor, is destined to become an ornament on his parents' front lawn. With wry humour and a character-driven approach that is reminiscent of Mike Leigh, Sweeney's films explore the grist of modern relationships within the context of a searing portrait of middle class malaise. Apathy mutes a simmering undercurrent of urban angst in *No More Monkeys Jumpin' on the Bed* (2000, Ross Weber), as an ensemble of thirty-something friends navigate equally unsatisfying personal and professional lives. The film ends, quite appropriately, with copy shop clerk Lyle arriving at Peter's apartment to make breakfast for his (ex)girlfriend Claire; Peter's bewilderment implies that, perhaps under less disaffected conditions, their infidelity should have yielded something other than french toast.

Capturing Surrey's suburban squalor with a gritty realism that's more evocative of Ken Loach than Mike Leigh, Bruce Spangler's *Protection* (2000) follows heroin-addicted mother, Betty (Jillian Fargey), as she struggles to keep her family together; the film shifts between the day's events and an evening encounter between Jane (Nancy Sivak), a child protection worker trying to negotiate the pressures of her job, and Don (Hiro Kanagawa), an ex-social worker worn down by the "system." Spangler

brings insights to the narrative from his own stint as a social worker in much the same way as Nathaniel Geary infuses his debut feature, *On the Corner* (2003), with knowledge gained working at the Portland Hotel. Informed by a harm reduction model, the Portland Hotel Society provides “housing facilities for those with mental health and substance abuse or addiction problems.”<sup>124</sup> The film gains a heightened sense of realism through the use of the old Portland site as a primary location, Brian Johnson’s Dogme-inspired handheld cinematography, and the contributions of neighbourhood consultant, Dean Wilson.<sup>125</sup> In *On the Corner*, teenaged Randy (Simon Baker) leaves the Reserve in Prince Rupert for Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside where he hopes to locate his older sister, Angel (Alex Rice), as well as finding the truth about their father. As Angel re-discovers the importance of family, Randy drifts deeper into the local drug scene. In discussing the film’s realism, as well as his decision to incorporate a First Nations’ focus, Geary notes that the Downtown Eastside “has been described as Vancouver’s native reservation because of the large numbers of aboriginal peoples who live in the community.”<sup>126</sup>

Ubiquitous drug use, leaky condos, gentrification, urban decay, and suburban sprawl communicate realities about Vancouver’s identity that belie the city’s role as a stunning backdrop for the locations industry. Indeed, Mark Peranson’s comment that *Last Wedding* depicts “the Vancouver left out of tourist brochures”<sup>127</sup> serves as a reminder of the extent to which the Pacific New Wave films differ from both transnational service productions and indigenous films like *The Grey Fox* (1982, Philip Borsos), *My American Cousin*, and *The Lotus Eaters* (1993, Paul Shapiro). In particular, the pristine beauty of the British Columbia landscape is increasingly displaced by a consideration of

the complexities of Vancouver as an urban space. It is important to note though, that despite the inclusion of the city's alleyways in BCFC promotional literature, Vancouver's role as a Hollywood setting involves an evacuation of meaning such that the city becomes "a surface the characters breeze past."<sup>128</sup> As a touchstone film of the New Wave, *The Grocer's Wife* presents an isolated rural town dominated by smokestacks that belch a vaporous haze over the otherwise idyllic setting. The protagonist, Timothy (Simon Webb), whose job seems to involve observing the smokestacks' performance, is less interested in changing his locale than with futile attempts to overcome his masculine inadequacies. By *Last Wedding*, the dinner party guests debate the architectural shortcomings of their changing urban landscape. Consequently, attention to the socio-historical specificity of Greater Vancouver may constitute the type of "break" that merits the designation of new wave, even though this burst of independent production actually comprises a continuation of patterns of spatial representation that Gasher notes over the course of the late 1980s and early 1990s.

### **Conclusion: Changing The Landscape**

Domestic production spending in British Columbia has declined by 60 percent since reaching a record high of \$419.4 million in 2000. Reasons for this decline include a trend toward lower cost reality programming,<sup>129</sup> the "crisis in Canadian drama" that has seen significant national drops in production and audience levels,<sup>130</sup> and pressures in the international marketplace. Thus, the fortunes of the provincial production industry continue to rely predominantly on the health of the television sector. Although the number of projects supported by the British Columbia Feature Film Fund dipped only slightly in 2002/03, the

program, a “one time provincial investment of \$4 million” to be spent over 3 years,<sup>131</sup> ended on March 31, 2004. Faced also with reductions in their provincially funded budget from \$4.5 million in 1995/96 to \$2.28 million in 2004/05, the Society has embarked on a comprehensive policy review in order “to determine B.C. Film’s role in sustaining the industry in years to come.”<sup>132</sup> Edwards further notes the exodus of key industry players like Frank Giustra of Lions Gate Entertainment, which now operates out of its California office, and the founders of Vancouver distributor Red Sky Entertainment, who returned to Ontario after the company was absorbed by International Keystone Entertainment in 2000.<sup>133</sup>

Best known for the production of “family films featuring trained animals helping to deliver wholesome messages”<sup>134</sup> Keystone’s library includes the *Air Bud* franchise (*Golden Receiver*, *World Pup*, *Seventh Inning Fetch*) and, most recently, the *MVP: Most Valuable Primate* films; the company also owns the post-production facility Western Post. This approach to developing a reliable brand-name in the lucrative kids’ market leads to the assessment that CEO Robert Vince “wants to be the next Walt Disney.”<sup>135</sup> At the same time, the fact that Keystone replaced indie film distributor Red Sky may lend credence to the argument that when it comes to independent filmmaking in British Columbia “there’s no there there.”<sup>136</sup> Nevertheless, *Air Bud*’s status as “one of the most successful Canadian films ever made [...] with more than \$25 million in North American box-office receipts”<sup>137</sup> may be emblematic of certain key patterns in B.C. cinema. The first film in the *Air Bud* series was directed by Charles Martin Smith, an American expatriate, who went on to write and direct *The Snow Walker* (2003), adapted from Farley Mowat’s short story “Walk Well My Brother;” Smith also stars in another

Mowat film adaptation, the Canadian classic *Never Cry Wolf* (1983, Carroll Ballard). If Pevere's arguments in favour of repatriating *The Terminator* (1984, James Cameron) are transposed to consider those who jump the border into Canada, then my B.C. necessarily includes *Air Bud*, along with *Stickgirl* and *Last Wedding*.

In other words, it is necessary to locate a framework able to account for the interdependence of divergent sectors of B.C. filmmaking because, as Andrew Higson argues, "the contingent communities that cinema imagines are much more likely to be either local or transnational than national."<sup>138</sup> Over the course of the late 1990's, British Columbia experienced a surge in domestic production that encompassed documentary, television and independent features, and thus represented a fully diversified indigenous industry. Although this rise in production volumes followed on the heels of the entrenchment of a strong locations industry and the evolution of a conducive cultural policy environment, more sustained analysis of financing and labour would be necessary to elaborate the links between these sectors and to fully assess the impact of shifts in the policy agenda. For the moment, it suffices to acknowledge that economics may indeed have something to do with art, that it is reductive to relegate transnational productions to the status of Hollywood invaders, and that they merit deeper consideration than the anecdotal pursuit of celebrity; lest the final point appear to (re)invoke a hierarchy of value, the study of Canada's sub-national cinematic jurisdictions would also benefit from an examination of popular discourse. From "New Realism" to "Pacific New Wave" to "West Coast Wave," there has been some difficulty with naming; but, as with the Toronto New Wave, which was initially described in the late 1980s as "new Canadian cinema," perhaps this Western

Canadian variant will eventually be narrowed to the more geographically accurate moniker of Vancouver New Wave.



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## ENDNOTES

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- <sup>2</sup> Mike Gasher, *Hollywood North: The Feature Film Industry in British Columbia* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2002), 3.
- <sup>3</sup> Spaner, 2003, 210 - 211.
- <sup>4</sup> Gasher, 4.
- <sup>5</sup> Geoff Pevere, "Ghostbusting: 100 Years of Canadian Cinema or Why My Canada Includes *The Terminator*," *Take One's* Essential Guide to Films & Filmmakers in Canada, ed. Wyndham Wise (Toronto: Canadian Independent Film & Television Association, 1999), 8.
- <sup>6</sup> Elizabeth Aird, "Cannell's tough talk impolitic yet useful," *The Vancouver Sun* (Dec. 23, 1989), E5.
- <sup>7</sup> "History is Relatives: The Films of Ann Marie Fleming," Pacific Cinémathèque program notes for Retrospective, March/April 2004.
- <sup>8</sup> Gasher, 129.
- <sup>9</sup> Gasher, 121.
- <sup>10</sup> Gasher, 133.
- <sup>11</sup> Gasher, 134.
- <sup>12</sup> Spaner, 2003, 211.
- <sup>13</sup> Spaner, 2003, 178.
- <sup>14</sup> Spaner, 2003, 180.
- <sup>15</sup> Spaner, 2003, 12.
- <sup>16</sup> Spaner, 2003, 82.
- <sup>17</sup> Spaner, 2003, 56-57.
- <sup>18</sup> Spaner, 2003, 86-89.
- <sup>19</sup> Pevere, 1999, 8.
- <sup>20</sup> Spaner, 2003, 214-215.
- <sup>21</sup> Spaner, 2003, 210-211.
- <sup>22</sup> Spaner, 2003, 76-77, 132-133.
- <sup>23</sup> Acland, 286.
- <sup>24</sup> Acland, 286.
- <sup>25</sup> Fiske, 41.
- <sup>26</sup> Spaner, 2003, 27-29.
- <sup>27</sup> Diane Burgess, "Charting the Course of the Pacific New Wave," *CineAction* 61 (2003), 59.
- <sup>28</sup> William Beard & Jerry White, "Introduction," *North of Everything: English-Canadian Cinema Since 1980* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2002), xxiii.
- <sup>29</sup> Susan Hayward, "Framing National Cinemas," *Cinema & Nation* eds.

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Mette Hjort and Scott MacKenzie (New York: Routledge, 2000), 91.

<sup>30</sup> Beard & White, xxii.

<sup>31</sup> Beard and White, xix.

<sup>32</sup> Philip Schlesinger, "The Sociological Scope of 'National Cinema,'" *Cinema & Nation* eds. Mette Hjort and Scott MacKenzie (New York: Routledge, 2000): 24.

<sup>33</sup> Schlesinger, 30.

<sup>34</sup> Schlesinger, 30.

<sup>35</sup> Gasher, 140.

<sup>36</sup> Gasher, 25.

<sup>37</sup> Gasher, 43.

<sup>38</sup> Gasher, 33-34.

<sup>39</sup> Gasher, 69.

<sup>40</sup> [www.bcfilmcommission.com](http://www.bcfilmcommission.com)

<sup>41</sup> Gasher, 57.

<sup>42</sup> Gasher, 98.

<sup>43</sup> Gasher, 98.

<sup>44</sup> Gasher, 97.

<sup>45</sup> Ian Edwards, "Vancouver, Toronto top location listing," *Playback* (February 17, 2003), 7.

<sup>46</sup> Edwards, 2003.

<sup>47</sup> Joanne Morgan, "Industry pans tax-credit changes: Film Incentive B.C. adjustments not enough to lure productions from Lower Mainland, industry says," *The Vancouver Sun* (April 17, 1998), D1. The April 18 edition of *The Vancouver Sun* indicates that the article headline misrepresented the story and that the industry was generally supportive of FIBC.

<sup>48</sup> <http://www.bcfilm.bc.ca/fibc.html>. The basic credit was raised from 20% to 30% effective from January 1, 2005 until March 31, 2006.

<sup>49</sup> <http://www.bcfilm.bc.ca/fibc.html>

<sup>50</sup> <http://www.omdc.on.ca>. On December 21, 2004, the basic rate was increased from 20% to 30% (pending the revisions being passed into law) effective as of January 1, 2005 for a period of 5 years.

<sup>51</sup> Gasher, 101.

<sup>52</sup> Laura Bracken, "Quebec increases tax credits, too," *Playback* (Jan. 17, 2005), 2.

<sup>53</sup> Ian Edwards, "B.C. moves to bring credits in line," *Playback* (Jan. 31, 2005), 1.

<sup>54</sup> British Columbia Film, *Annual Report 2002/2003* (for period ending March 31, 2003), 7.

<sup>55</sup> British Columbia Film, *Annual Report 2002/2003* (for period ending March 31, 2003), 7.

<sup>56</sup> Gasher, 78.

<sup>57</sup> Gasher, 25.

<sup>58</sup> Gasher, 136.

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- <sup>59</sup> Schlesinger, 30.
- <sup>60</sup> Gasher, 133-134.
- <sup>61</sup> Gasher, 143.
- <sup>62</sup> [www.bcfilmcommission.com](http://www.bcfilmcommission.com)
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- <sup>64</sup> Gasher, 82.
- <sup>65</sup> Gasher, 94.
- <sup>66</sup> Gasher, 73-74.
- <sup>67</sup> Citing Rutherford, Michael Dorland, *So Close to the State/s: The Emergence of Canadian Feature Film Policy*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 46.
- <sup>68</sup> Dorland, 48.
- <sup>69</sup> Dorland citing Johnson, 49. Emphasis added by Dorland.
- <sup>70</sup> Manjunath Pendakur, *Canadian Dreams & American Control: The Political Economy of the Canadian Film Industry*, (Toronto: Garamond Press, 1990), 178.
- <sup>71</sup> Pendakur, 177.
- <sup>72</sup> Pendakur, 174.
- <sup>73</sup> Department of the Secretary of State, Canada, *The Film Industry in Canada*, (Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services Canada, 1977), cited in Gasher, 57.
- <sup>74</sup> Gasher, 57.
- <sup>75</sup> Geoff Pevere, "Middle of Nowhere: Ontario Movies After 1980," *Post Script*. 15:1 (1995), 11.
- <sup>76</sup> Pevere, 1995, 11.
- <sup>77</sup> Pevere, 1995, 12.
- <sup>78</sup> Aird.
- <sup>79</sup> David Spaner, "The studio system series: Hollywood North," *The Province* (Vancouver) (September 27, 1999), B1.
- <sup>80</sup> Aird.
- <sup>81</sup> David Lang, "Studio sound for Vancouver; New centre the final ingredient in West Coast's movie mix," *Edmonton Journal* (June 29, 1990), C8.
- <sup>82</sup> Glen Schaefer, "Busiest movie year ever," *The Province* (Vancouver) (April 2, 2000), B2.
- <sup>83</sup> Michael McCullough, "Homegrown production company is Brightlight of B.C. film scene," *The Vancouver Sun*, (August 1, 2003), G1.
- <sup>84</sup> McCullough; [www.brightlightpictures.com](http://www.brightlightpictures.com)
- <sup>85</sup> [www.brightlightpictures.com](http://www.brightlightpictures.com)
- <sup>86</sup> Ian Edwards, "B.C. brain drain: Lotusland copes with exodus of top players," *Playback* (January 19, 2004), 1, 4.
- <sup>87</sup> Edwards, 4.

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- <sup>88</sup> [www.screensirenpictures.com](http://www.screensirenpictures.com)
- <sup>89</sup> [www.globalmechanic.com](http://www.globalmechanic.com)
- <sup>90</sup> British Columbia Film, *Annual Report 2000/2001* (for the period ending March 31, 2001), 2. <http://www.bcfilm.bc.ca/annreport.html>
- <sup>91</sup> Gasher, 84.
- <sup>92</sup> Gasher, 86.
- <sup>93</sup> Gasher, 88, 90.
- <sup>94</sup> British Columbia Film, *Annual Report 1998/1999* (for the period ending March 31, 1999), 8. <http://www.bcfilm.bc.ca/annreport.html>
- <sup>95</sup> British Columbia Film, *Annual Report 1998/1999* (for the period ending March 31, 1999), 9. <http://www.bcfilm.bc.ca/annreport.html>
- <sup>96</sup> British Columbia Film, *Annual Report 1998/1999* (for the period ending March 31, 1999), 10. <http://www.bcfilm.bc.ca/annreport.html>
- <sup>97</sup> British Columbia Film, *Annual Report 2000/2001* (for the period ending March 31, 2001), 8. <http://www.bcfilm.bc.ca/annreport.html>
- <sup>98</sup> British Columbia Film, *Annual Report 1998/1999* (for the period ending March 31, 1999), 4. <http://www.bcfilm.bc.ca/annreport.html>
- <sup>99</sup> British Columbia Film, *Annual Report 1998/1999* (for the period ending March 31, 1999), 4. <http://www.bcfilm.bc.ca/annreport.html>
- <sup>100</sup> British Columbia Film, *Annual Report 2002/2003* (for the period ending March 31, 2003), 7.
- <sup>101</sup> British Columbia Film, *Annual Report 2002/2003* (for the period ending March 31, 2003).
- <sup>102</sup> Pevere, 1995, 9.
- <sup>103</sup> Pevere, 1995, 10.
- <sup>104</sup> William Beard, "Thirty-two Paragraphs about David Cronenberg," *North of Everything: English-Canadian Cinema Since 1980*, William Beard and Jerry White eds., (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2002), 144. Beard refers to the scandal that followed Robert Fulford's denouncement of the Canadian Film Development Corporation for providing public funds to *Shivers*.
- <sup>105</sup> I discuss the origins of the term Pacific New Wave in more detail in "Charting the Course of the Pacific New Wave," *CineAction 61* (2003), 29-33.
- <sup>106</sup> Cori Howard, "The Irony of the Anti-blockbuster," *National Post* (August 7, 1999), 4.
- <sup>107</sup> Ken Eisner, "New Realism," *Georgia Straight* (September 14-21, 2000), 18.
- <sup>108</sup> Spaner, 2003, 92.
- <sup>109</sup> Geoff Pevere, "No Place Like Home: The films of Atom Egoyan," *Exotica*, (Toronto: Couch House Press, 1995), 14, 11.
- <sup>110</sup> Pevere, 1995b, 12.
- <sup>111</sup> Burgess, 33.
- <sup>112</sup> Burgess, 30.
- <sup>113</sup> Cameron Bailey, "Standing in the Kitchen all Night: A Secret History of the Toronto New Wave," *Take One 9:28* (Summer 2000), 8.

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- <sup>114</sup> Bailey, 7.
- <sup>115</sup> Pevere, 1995a, 16.
- <sup>116</sup> Bailey, 10.
- <sup>117</sup> Burgess, 31.
- <sup>118</sup> Reif, 133.
- <sup>119</sup> Reif, 132-133.
- <sup>120</sup> [http://www.dogme95.dk/the\\_vow/vow.html](http://www.dogme95.dk/the_vow/vow.html). Due to budgetary constraints, the *Noroc* filmmakers could not comply with the requirement of finishing on 35mm, and premiered instead on D-9 at the Vancouver International Festival.
- <sup>121</sup> Additional information about Versatile Shipyards and the filming of *Noroc* can be found in the NFB documentary *Alain Dubreuil Alchemist* (Barbeau, 2002)
- <sup>122</sup> Robin Wood, "The Party's Over: Rollercoaster," *CineAction* 57 (2002), 33.
- <sup>123</sup> Wood, 33.
- <sup>124</sup> <http://www.onthecorner.ca/html/home.html>
- <sup>125</sup> Wilson is featured in Nettie Wild's feature documentary *Fix: The Story of an Addicted City* (2002).
- <sup>126</sup> Interview with Nathaniel Geary, <http://www.onthecorner.ca/html/home.html>.
- <sup>127</sup> Mark Peranson, "Riding the Pacific New Wave," *The Globe and Mail* (September 3, 2001), R1.
- <sup>128</sup> Gasher, 118.
- <sup>129</sup> British Columbia Film, *Annual Report 2001/2002* (for the period ending March 31, 2002), 4.
- <sup>130</sup> British Columbia Film, *Annual Report 2002/2003* (for the period ending March 31, 2003), 4.
- <sup>131</sup> The Fund initially constituted \$5 million; however, \$1 million was returned to the Ministry in 2002/03.
- <sup>132</sup> British Columbia Film, "British Columbia Film to Undertake Comprehensive Program Review" (press release dated February 24, 2004), <http://www.bcfilm.bc.ca/releases/Feb24-04.html>
- <sup>133</sup> Edwards, 4.
- <sup>134</sup> Lynne McNamara, "MVP producer going ape again: Robert Vince brings back Bernie, his hockey-playing chimpanzee, for the sequel to his simian-with-skates story," *The Vancouver Sun* (May 2, 2001), C5.
- <sup>135</sup> Katherine Monk, "B.C. man wants to be the next Walt Disney," *The Vancouver Sun* (August 11, 2000), A1.
- <sup>136</sup> McCullough.
- <sup>137</sup> Monk.
- <sup>138</sup> Andrew Higson, "The Limiting Imagination of National Cinema," *Cinema & Nation*, Mette Hjort and Scott MacKenzie eds. (New York: Routledge, 2000), 73.



## CHAPTER 6

### Surfing the Toronto New Wave: Policy, Paradigm Shifts and Post-Nationalism

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In his introduction to the 1980 version of *Self Portrait*, only the second anthology to be produced on Canadian cinema,<sup>1</sup> Piers Handling proffered the following melancholic observation: "Exploring Canadian film is analogous to meeting a person suffering from amnesia. Their past is no longer remembered. It has no considered relationship to their present. Yet this past has an enormous bearing on events taking shape at this moment. It has made them what they are."<sup>2</sup> The impulse behind the first *Self Portrait* was modest: a tentative celebration of the arrival of Canadian cinema as evidenced in the history of documentary and animation production at the National Film Board and by the more tantalizing specter of an emerging feature film tradition, captured by the optimistic title of Peter Harcourt's contribution to that volume: "The Beginning of a Beginning."

The essays in the original *Self Portrait* were, of course, infused with what Michael Dorland, twenty years later, would refer to as the irreducible idealism of Canadian film history. “[H]ortatory,” “prescriptive and moralistic,”<sup>3</sup> Canadian film history, according to Dorland, was based on “wish fulfillment” and inspired by a prevailing “ideal-typical theory of a Canadian national cinema as defined by Canadian film scholars.”<sup>4</sup> To be sure, in 1980, Canadian film scholarship was unabashedly activist, identifying its mission as one of fostering and promoting a very particular and vulnerable sector of Canadian culture: an art cinema. If the original writers in *Self Portrait*, idealized such a cinema, it was precisely because of its implicit resistance to an industrial concept of cinema and to a developing federal cultural policy predilection for evaluating film production exclusively in terms of the market. Valuing a cinematic practice for its intrinsic qualities allied early Canadian film scholarship with the tradition of public policy discourse stretching from the Aird Commission (1929) through to the Massey Report (1951) and beyond that advocated for the support of public culture rationalized in terms of its pedagogic, aesthetic and social contribution. While it is true that much of this discourse is articulated within the familiar Manichean dichotomy which pitched American commercial culture against a state subsidized Canadian public culture, (as Graham Spry quipped to the Aird Commission: the state or the States), let me suggest that this binary was already conjugated with a third term: an indigenous model of commercial culture. In 1980, Harcourt’s optimism, particularly as this relates to the flourishing of an English Canadian art cinema, could only be retrospective. While 1964 did indeed seem to be a year of promise, witnessing as it did the release of two soon to be canonized art films:



*Le Chat dans le sac* (Gilles Groulx) and *Nobody Waved Goodbye* (Don Owen), only the Groulx film was followed by a substantial flourishing of a national art cinema in Quebec (led by a luminous canon of prolific directors: Gilles Carles, Jean-Pierre Lefebvre, Jean-Claude Labreque, Jacques Leduc, Francis Mankiewicz) in the period leading up to 1980. English Canadian production, particularly in Ontario was, for the most part, dominated by the effluent of the capital cost allowance (1977-1981) which nurtured a generation of commercial producers and instantly inflated production of features and co-productions. In and amongst the deluge of commercial features which ranged from the unprecedented box office success of *Meatballs* (1978), through the steady genre offerings of David Cronenberg (well before he came to be identified as a bona fide art cinema director) to the less stellar achievements of *City on Fire* (1978) or *The Kinky Coaches and the Pom-Pom Pussycats* (1979), English Canadian directors based in Ontario such as Alan King, Bill Fruet, Don Owen, Don Shebib or Peter Pearson produced occasional features distinguished by their distinctive narrative sensibilities. Films like *Paperback Hero* (Peter Pearson, 1972), *Between Friends* (Don Shebib, 1972), *Rubber Gun* (Stephen Lack, 1974), *Who Has Seen the Wind* (Allan King, 1976) and *Outrageous* (1977) seemed to follow on the promise identified in Harcourt's article of an English Canadian art cinema, characterized, in the most general terms, by an observational aesthetic and tone of "wistful lyricism."<sup>5</sup> But these films were exceptions to the generally undistinguished avalanche of commercial production at the time and by the fact that many of these directors also moved with ease into more industrial oriented efforts.

While the promise of 1964 seemed to ingloriously crash on the shoal of the tax shelter years, subsequent shifts in

federal and provincial cultural policies, some aspects of which have already been discussed in Peter Urquhart's contribution to this book, the evolution of a new generation of Canadian filmmakers, and the revival of an international art cinema at key institutional sites (Cannes, Sundance) produced a new wave of unguarded optimism in the latter part of the 1980s concerning the possibility of a New Wave of English Canadian art cinema. If 1964 could be retroactively seized upon as the putative origin of a new wave in 1980, the annus mirabilis which re-ignited hopes at the end of that decade was 1987, the year *I've Heard the Mermaids Singing* made the most spectacular debut in the history of Canadian cinema, garnering the Prix de la Jeunesse at the Cannes Film Festival and coming home to open the Toronto Festival of Festivals. The same year also witnessed a slightly more muted, but no less auspicious release of Atom Egoyan's second feature, *Family Viewing* which won the Toronto City Award at the Toronto Festival of Festivals and, perhaps even more importantly, was blessed with the imprimatur of European cultural capital by having Wim Wenders bestow his prize money on the young director at the Montreal World Festival. Bruce McDonald would add the third name to this triumvirate in 1989 with his debut feature *Roadkill*, which also won the City Award at the Toronto Festival of Festivals. His notorious "outlaw" editorship of *Cinema Canada* that year brazenly thumbed its nose at the old guard of tax shelter films and announced the rise of a new generation of edgy and alternative filmmaking. What would become known and promoted as the "Toronto New Wave" was launched, a second "beginning of a beginning."<sup>6</sup>

Before 1987, David Cronenberg had already contributed significantly to a second wave of English Canadian cinema. But in order to manage the scope of this study, I

have elected not to include Cronenberg in the formation of the New Wave, although he is clearly one of the most significant directors to work in Ontario. His career trajectory is so distinctive that it really does warrant a separate study and cannot be glossed in the generalizations that, for reasons of space, I will be forced to make. For all things Cronenberg, I thus refer the reader to Bill Beard's *The Artist as Monster: the Cinema of David Cronenberg* (2001) and Pierre Véronneau's *David Cronenberg : la beauté du chaos* (2003)

Within the limits of this piece, I would like to investigate the evolution of the Toronto New Wave in relation to four key areas:

1. the role of the international festival apparatus in bestowing cultural capital and in generating a niche market for art cinema in this period;
2. the evolving policy environment at both the federal and provincial level which is continuously articulated in relation to two competing models of film production: one cultural, the other, industrial;
3. the social, political and economic impact of globalization in this period which is most symbolically marked by the historical signing of first FTA under the Mulroney government in 1989 and NAFTA in 1994;
4. the shaping of the aesthetic form and new narrative contents of the Toronto New Wave by international flows of cultural and economic influence.

While the construction of the feature films in the New Wave represents the main focus of my study of Ontario films since 1987, I am aware of the danger of contributing to a canonical and idealist version of film studies which isolates the feature film as the singular and most crucial form of a national cinema. I prefer the formulations of revisionist theorists like David McIntosh or Tom O'Regan who characterize national cinema as a "messy assemblage" that necessarily includes a diverse range of productions, institutions and hybrid textual practices. As McIntosh argues:

Canadian cinema is a promiscuous and unprincipled assemblage in that there is no nation-state principle that coheres its component parts or allows for a unitary explanatory principle. Mapping Canadian cinema as an engine of proliferating others is crucial to perceiving that film production is not just a nation-state or econometric effect, but an effervescent, messy, non-unified, heterogeneous, popular, informal, dynamic and continuously emergent form of both cultural production and economic activity.<sup>7</sup>

In point of fact, the New Wave cannot fully be accounted for without acknowledging the absolutely crucial role of the arts councils and film co-op movement in nurturing of a new generation of independent filmmakers in Toronto in the nineteen eighties and into the early nineties. Rozema's first fiction short, *Passion, A Letter in 16mm* (1985) was supported with production assistance from LIFT (the Liaison of Independent Filmmakers of Toronto), as was *Family Viewing*, Bruce McDonald's *Knock, Knock* (1985), Peter Mettler's *Scissere* (1982) and Jeremy Podeswa's *Eclipse* (1993). Mettler was one of the founding members of LIFT

and the impoverished and unkempt McDonald could often be found crashing on the couch in the LIFT office while he was editing *Knock, Knock*. In Ottawa, IFCO (Independent Filmmakers' Co-op of Ottawa) has played a similar role. Although it has not produced a New Wave comparable to that which came out of LIFT, IFCO has nonetheless been instrumental in the recent emergence of Lee Demarbre as a promising filmmaker whose first feature, *Jesus Christ Vampire Hunter* (2002), has developed a sizeable cult following.<sup>8</sup> And in fact, as Jerry White points out in his piece at the end of this collection, every region in Canada owes much of its film culture to the co-op movement.

LIFT had been organized following the inglorious bankruptcy of the Toronto Film Co-op in 1978. Originally housed in Rochdale (the notorious housing experiment on the University of Toronto campus which evolved into a haven of drugs and alternative lifestyles), the film co-op was inextricably bound to a counter-cultural momentum and to the flourishing of a cultural nationalism in English Canada. According to Patrick Lee:

The political bias of the members was markedly anti-establishment, if not revolutionary. I remember a long debate on whether or not we should be a strictly Marxist film co-op.<sup>9</sup>

Early members like Fredrik Mantor and Sandra Gathercole went on to form the Council of Canadian Filmmakers, a national lobby on film policy issues. Experimental filmmakers Michael Snow, Bruce Elder and Keith Locke were active participants while Stan Brakhage was a frequent guest. Fueled by grants from the Ontario Council for the Arts and OFY (Opportunities for Youth) and LIP (Local Initiative Program) grants (two Trudeau era federal initia-

tives which provided employment grants to a range of progressive and civil society initiatives), the Co-op held workshops and screenings, purchased 16mm production equipment and continuously expanded, ending up in newly renovated digs on 67 Portland Street, a move that eventually culminated in the bankruptcy. A post mortem account written by Bruce Elder and published a year later in Cinema Canada argued that the demise of the Co-op was directly attributable to its decision to move “in a decidedly more commercial course,” a move that both alienated the experimental faction and opened the co-op to filmmakers who were more invested in gaining some purchase in the developing film industry in Toronto.<sup>10</sup>

LIFT determined to pursue a more neutral political and aesthetically inclusive course. Founded by film graduates from York University, Ryerson Polytechnical Institute (now Ryerson Polytechnic University) and Sheridan College,<sup>11</sup> the organization was forged around an explicit commitment to non-commercial, independent cinema. Independent film was not yet a niche marketing device in 1978, and the lines could more clearly and transparently be drawn between the production context and orientation of commercial tax shelter features and the low budget formally inventive practice of LIFT members whose work was supported through some combination of arts council grants, deferrals, and the artist’s own financial resources. Alexandra Raffé, who would go on to produce *Mermaids*, was one of the first coordinators of LIFT as it set up a small office on King Street. In short, almost all of the New Wave directors and producers began their careers in the alternative sector, working on low budget projects of a cultural nature.

LIFT’s more inclusive approach also mediated its relationship with the experimental film community, a

community that was evolving and changing in the eighties, quite frequently in reaction to a perceived hegemony of an older generation of structuralist filmmakers emblemized by Michael Snow, Bruce Elder and Stan Brakhage. Younger filmmakers coming onto the scene like Peter Mettler, Phil Hoffman and Michael Hoolbloom were less invested in high modernism<sup>12</sup> than in evolving a hybrid practice which blurred the boundaries between fiction, documentary and autobiography. These differences would come to head in the Experimental Film Congress in 1989 in which the international lines of this division were articulated in an infamous manifesto denouncing the 1960s Avant-Garde as a “bastion of white male privilege.”<sup>13</sup> While the experimental world has always been known for its proliferation of manifestoes and violent schisms, perhaps what was most significant about the Congress manifesto, was its public representation of a new generation of experimental film artists who defined their practice in relation to a range of social issues and new political identities and who, most significantly, embraced storytelling and the possibilities of a vitally deconstructed narrative, or “neo-narrative” as it was framed in the parlance of the time. Weaned on the general dissemination of film theory and on a selective appreciation of international art cinema, the re-alignment of alternative cinema around narrative would have a major impact on the leading directors of Ontario’s New Wave.

### **The Birth of the New wave on the Croisette at Cannes**

Festivals are the Olympics of the show-business economy, even though not all are as market-oriented as the Cannes Festival. What competes at festivals are less individual films than film concepts, film ideas, sales an-

gles, or what Stephen Heath called a film's "narrative image...." Created by the press backup, by promotional activity that suggests several sources of appeal or cultural access [...] what counts at festivals is novelty, discovery, the element of surprise.<sup>14</sup>

Thomas Elsaesser, *When Fires Were Started*.

The delirious success of *Mermaids* at Cannes in 1987 ushered in an era of unprecedented success of Ontario features at international festivals, the Directors Fortnight, of course, representing the pinnacle of international critical approbation. All of Egoyan's films, beginning with *Speaking Parts* (1998), were screened at Cannes, although Egoyan withdrew *Ararat* from the official competition (ostensibly due to its sensitive political material) and all of his films have attracted a range of international prizes at that festival, *Exotica* winning the International Critics Prize in 1994 and the *Sweet Hereafter* scoring the Grand Jury, International Critics, and Ecumenical Jury prizes in 1997. The swath cut by Egoyan and Rozema cannot be underestimated for the international attention it focused on a developing tradition of independent English Canadian cinema. Following their lead, Don McKellar's *Last Night* was invited to Cannes in 1998 where it, too, garnered the Prix de la Jeunesse and, in the following year, Jeremy Podeswa's *The Five Senses* (1999) premiered at the Directors Fortnight, receiving rave reviews and selling in fifty territories. The significance of Cannes, however, is far more complex than our usual colonial narrative which insists that Canadian product is only valued at home when it has achieved recognition elsewhere. Cannes was instrumental in bestowing an international imprimatur of novelty and "hipness" on these directors and in generating a marketing niche that



facilitated their entry into international markets. At home, their international success converted them into new ideal-typical model of feature film against which all other cinema began to be measured.

One of the primary criteria for inclusion in a “new wave,” according to Thomas Elsaesser is bulk. Once there is a demand and expectation generated around a brand name director, there must be consistent product to supply that demand. The German New Wave, for example, launched in 1974 at Cannes, is unthinkable without the astonishing prolificacy of Fassbinder (forty films in fifteen years). While Canadians, for the most part,<sup>15</sup> have avoided drug addiction as an impetus to enhanced production, the positioning of Egoyan as the central figure in the Toronto New Wave rests on his extraordinary workmanlike efficiency, honed in the trenches of television series directing, of producing a feature every two or three years. The issue of bulk becomes crucial in the consideration of membership in the New Wave. Leon Marr’s *Dancing in the Dark* also premiered at Cannes in the annus mirabilis of 1987, but because there were no follow up features, this provocative and rich film has dropped below the radar of standard critical constructions of the New Wave.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, a series of extraordinary one-off features produced in the same period: *A Winter Tan* (Aerlyn Weisman, John Walker, Louise Clark, 1987), *I Love a Man in Uniform* (David Wellington, 1993), or *H* (Darrell Wasyk, 1989), all of which won the prestigious City Award at the Toronto Festival of Festivals are generally not considered to be a central part of the Toronto New Wave precisely because the directors have failed to meet the requirement of serial production. A New Wave is constituted not out of individual films but on the bodies of its auteurs. These bodies generate a sense of expectation, a branding, connected to the textual, narrative

and aesthetic recognition of a director's products: counter cinema, semiotics and politics in Godard, marginality and melodrama in Fassbinder, sexual obsession and technology in Egoyan, whimsy and feminism in Rozema etc.

### **Policy Environment**

The critical success of *Family Viewing* and the commercial and critical success of *Mermaids* were instrumental in rationalizing the system of Canadian funding agencies set up to promote and invest in feature film production, particularly the newly formed Ontario Film Development Corporation, an institution which became crucial to the growth and development of the New Wave. In response to the rapid growth of a private production sector across the country, both Quebec (1977) and Alberta (1982) had set up their own provincial film funding commissions and there had been a number of reports commissioned in Ontario on potential provincial involvement in the film industry. Beginning with, "A Profile of the Cultural Industries in Ontario" in 1982 and followed by the Macaulay Report and the Audly report in 1984, all concluded with a call for "an effective, integrated policy to provide financial support for the development of the industry, giving attention both to economic and cultural objectives."<sup>17</sup> Once the forty three year provincial rule of the Conservatives had been broken by the election of David Peterson and his Liberal government in 1985, Peterson announced the establishment of the Ontario Film Development Corporation with a budget of 20 million dollars over three years.

Wayne Clarkson, former head of the Festival of Festivals was appointed chairman and chief executive officer of the OFDC and in an interview in *Cinema Canada* in 1986, he

speculated on why the Liberals had moved so quickly to set up the new institution:

The service industries, communications, the new technology had all become important. Film, television, commercials, the broadest interpretation of the communications industry, had become big business in Ontario. It employs a great many people and it's a great way to promote yourself internationally.<sup>18</sup>

Clarkson's insight into the Liberal move situates the founding of the OFDC in relation to an industrial rationalization of state support that acknowledges the progressive transformation of the economic base in the province into a post-Fordist and post-industrial service and information economy. By 1985, Ontario was already positioned as the fourth largest centre in North America for film and television production. Of the two, of course, it was television production that constituted the most profitable and growing sector of the industry, a fact recognized by the 1984 transformation of the Canadian Film Development Corporation into Telefilm which involved a major shift in investment priorities to the private broadcast sector.<sup>19</sup>

In part, the distinctive mandate of the OFDC was governed by the recognition that less monies were available for feature film production at the federal level. As Clarkson framed it in 1986: "our priority will be on low to medium budget feature films aimed at the theatrical market." But while emphasizing that the OFDC would be investing in "risky, low-budget films by new directors and new writers," Clarkson cautioned that "the OFDC is not a grant-giving agency." "This is a market-driven fund," he added, "we will be investing our money; we will be extending loans; we expect a return on our investment."<sup>20</sup>

The curious tension, if not outright contradiction between the industrial and cultural goals of the OFDC were hardly unique to the broader field of state cultural policy in Canada. As Michael Dorland has convincingly argued in *So Close to the State/s*, the particular conflation of cultural and economic objectives—the rationalization of public support for a private film industry through the discourse of nationalist economism—already constituted the bedrock of the policy rhetoric which preceded and informed the orientation of the Canadian Film Development Corporation in the early 1960s.<sup>21</sup> This conflation becomes particularly acute in the 1980s and 1990s, a period in which public cultural institutions such as the National Film Board and the CBC saw their federal allocations steadily eroded as state support shifted away irrevocably toward the private sector. While gradual and a constant site of negotiation, this shift represented a dramatic re-articulation of the historic role of the state in cultural matters and a radical reframing of the relationships and boundaries between the private and public sectors. As Marc Raboy has argued this re-orientation neatly morphed with broader conservative economic trends in this period:

Since the 1980's, nationalist rhetoric notwithstanding, Canada's cultural policy has aimed at giving Canadian cultural industries a competitive advantage in the global marketplace. This has made Canada a willing partner in the global trend toward market liberalization, deregulation, and corporate concentration.<sup>22</sup>

What is so significant about the phenomenal success of *I've Heard the Mermaids Singing* is how it resolved those contradictions in extraordinary ways. One of the first films

that the OFDC had invested in, made for a very modest budget of \$350,000, the film was not only a critical success, it sold to 37 countries world wide, was picked up by Miramax for US distribution and went on to gross more than 5 million dollars, an unprecedented and never to be replicated feat. *Family Viewing*, at an even more minuscule budget (\$160,00) was also one of the first films that OFDC supported. As Egoyan relates it, he originally had no intention of working beyond the limited budget of an arts council grant but, much to his surprise, he discovered that the OFDC were using *Next of Kin* (his first no budget feature) as an example of the type of work they wanted to support. "I thought, at that point, I would be a fool not to take advantage of the situation," he wryly noted."<sup>23</sup> Both of these films eerily materialize Wayne Clarkson's vision in 1986 of risky films by young directors with international market potential. While few other films in the next decade would match *Mermaid's* recoupment miracle or Egoyan's cachet with international and national film critics, both directors would nonetheless be installed in the policy rhetoric of both the OFDC and Telefilm as key exemplars of the viability and vision of the state funding system<sup>24</sup>. At the end of the 1980s, it was clear that the pendulum of cultural policy had swung to the arts pole, and the early success of the OFDC in seeding a roster of lively young talent proved the possibility of creating an economically viable cultural cinema.

Developments within the next decade ensured that the relation between the cultural and industrial orientations in cultural policy became increasingly complex. Indeed, Alexandra Raffé has argued that the growth of the commercial sector during this period is precisely "what has enabled cultural cinema to happen" by providing recalcitrant bureaucrats and politicians with hard evidence

of the economic payoff of cultural activity. As Raffé points out, in 1987 when the OFDC was first formed, production activity in Ontario totaled approximately 95 million dollars.<sup>25</sup> By 1993, that total had tripled to 338 million and by 2002, the total had grown to an astounding 984 million.<sup>26</sup> Even given the fact that half of this kinetic increase is due to American runaway productions that persistently clog Toronto streets throughout the year, the rate of growth of the domestic industry in this period had been nothing short of astounding. This growth coalesced in the formation of the Canadian Film and Television Producers Association (CTFPA), a powerful lobby organization that had grown directly out of the Association of Motion Picture Producers and Laboratories of Canada (AMPPLC). Founded in 1948, the AMPPLC had focused its lobbying efforts on reducing the role of the National Film Board of Canada (NFB), and expanding the opportunities for Canada's independent producers. As Ted Magder put it: "throughout the 1950s and into the early 1960s, the AMPPLC challenged what it described as the NFB's 'expansionist, monopolistic psychology' and repeatedly called for the contracting-out of government film work."<sup>27</sup> During the 1980s and 1990s the CTFPA represented over 400 companies, many of whom, like Robert Lantos' Alliance Communications, had built their fortune through distribution and production agreements with the American majors. During the course of these two decades, this private industry group became the most powerful influence shaping broadcast and cultural policy.<sup>28</sup>

So it was that the public discourse around support to the arts shifted in this period as both industry spokespeople and cultural bureaucrats framed their arguments through an economist discourse of jobs and the multiplier effect on secondary industry. In point of fact, this kind of

discourse was operative even before the ultra conservative government of Mike Harris was elected in 1995. An advisory committee, set up in 1994 under the lefty New Democratic Party provincial government of Bob Rae, and co-chaired by Alexandra Raffé and Peter Grant, introduced its findings by writing: "Rarely do people think of culture as an industry. Culture is something we nurture and support because it enriches our lives [...] but culture [...] at the same time creates jobs and wealth [...] and makes a significant contribution to our economy."<sup>29</sup> The stated goal of the committee was to suggest a coordinated industrial policy aimed at increasing Ontario based producers "share of the international and domestic markets for entertainment and information products."<sup>30</sup>

A direct result of this reframing of cultural policy around industry objectives came by way of the instigation of a series of provincial tax credit schemes that proliferate throughout this era. This domino effect was instigated in 1988, the year that Quebec introduced a generous provincial write off, which threatened to undermine Ontario's position as the leading production centre in Canada. The Liberal government in Ontario responded by approving a two year 30 million dollar investment rebate program to be administered through the Ontario Film Investment Program that would provide private investors with a rebate of 20 percent on their investments in Ontario based productions. Soon, film investment corporations were organized in every province ruthlessly competing with each other to attract production and the lucrative economic payoffs of offshore productions.<sup>31</sup> The tax credit schemes were the perfect industrial model of state support. Freed from the burden of any evaluative criteria (aesthetic, cultural or otherwise), they were indiscriminate and privileged the top end of production activity, ie. large

companies who had access to private capital. In line with federal tax credit program, provincial programs later tied the calculation of tax credits directly to labour costs, developing a rebate program that refunded a percentage of Ontario labour costs, again favouring the large budget production with its immense crew costs. When the Mike Harris "Common Sense Revolution" laid waste to the OFDC in 1995, terminating all investment in feature film and television production, the two programs that were preserved were the tax credit scheme and the Film Liaison Office that worked to attract and facilitate foreign productions shooting in Ontario.

The evolution of provincial film policy over the last two decades provides an important background for considering the particular role of the New Wave feature films within the entire landscape of film production within the province. While all New Wave directors began their careers producing low budget aesthetically risky films which, for the most part, were made through an eclectic array of co-op and arts council support, it is clear that by their second feature, the mode of financing and producing these films had been inserted into the state funding apparatus. That is to say that while their artistic voices were independent and their aspirations personal and cultural, the fact remained that their later films were facilitated and supported by state institutions whose mandate was largely to bolster a private sector film industry. During the late 1980s and early 1990s, there was a period of openness in these institutions that allowed them to take risks with edgier directors and narrative styles. That openness, however, had definitively closed down by 1995 as the election of the Conservatives in Ontario and the economic realignments in a globalizing industry conspired to reinstate a purely industrial model



of support. Maintaining their commitment to art cinema certainly distinguished the New Wave directors from the tide of commercial activity which surrounded them, although, their status as marginals or outlaws has to be considered either highly relative or deeply nostalgic, given how many of these directors depend on television directing to augment their incomes and given the rising budgets and international co-production deals most enjoyed at the end of the nineties. Their importance in the generation of cultural capital, however, cannot be underestimated. For all its economist rhetoric, film and television production does not deal in products as prosaic as pork hocks or shakes and shingles. The art cinema and auteur fraction of production activity is crucial in enhancing the public profile of the whole and in providing a rationalization that is not crudely reduced to a profit margin. Festival and critical success generate the holy grail of "buzz" that circulates through newspaper reporting, reviews and media appearances and that puts the best and brightest forward as the public face of a vast industrial enterprise.

### **Internationalism**

Atom Egoyan: "I don't make films for North American Audiences." *Cinema Canada* (1989).<sup>32</sup>

As Ian Angus has recently noted "during 1963-1988, left-nationalism housed the most influential counter-hegemonic identity politics in English Canada."<sup>33</sup> Central to this politics, of course, was the critical and para-critical apparatus of festivals, journals and media reviews devoted to the explication and promotion of the national allegory as the central interpretive framework in the study and commentary on Canadian feature film. As has been well

documented by recent scholarship, this discourse was structured around unitary concepts of national identity based in the elision of multiple forms of cultural, sexual or ethnic difference. The vitality of that counter hegemonic identity politics, however, was central to the mobilization of broad popular opposition to the explicit agenda of globalization embedded in the first Free Trade Agreement signed by Canada and the United States in 1989 although its force, as a counter-hegemonic politic began to diminish from that point on. The signing of the agreement not only submitted trade relations to a supranational body of law intended to restrict the capacity of the state to act in a national interest, it ushered in what Stephen McBride has termed a “paradigm shift,” a reconstitution of national ideological hegemony around a neo-liberal agenda of deregulation, privatization and decentralization<sup>34</sup> in which the role of the welfare state would be diminished and replaced by the market as the central mechanism for the distribution of economic and social value.

While it is difficult to pose a direct and immediate linkage between continental economic integration and the new narrative sensibilities and thematic obsessions of the Toronto New Wave, it is clear that the films embody a very different zeitgeist from their immediate predecessors. Films like *Outrageous!* (1977, Richard Benner), *Going Down the Road* (1970, Don Shebib) or *One Man* (1977, Robin Spry) were steeped in a social democratic critique of capitalism embodied in narratives which pitted the individual against the ruthlessness and intractability of the “system.” All of these films were modeled around a documentary observation of space and a powerful sense of regional and local geographies. In one of the only essays to consider the New Wave as a generalized phenomenon, David Pike hypothesized that what made the New Wave distinctive was the

manner in which it marked “the passage from failed resistance to American hegemony into an aesthetic response to the new situation of multi-national hegemony.”<sup>35</sup>

Situating the New Wave in relation to a shift from an explicitly political to an aesthetic discourse in response to the dissolution of a left nationalist consensus is, I believe, crucial to understanding the films as complex mediations of a new social situation, in which the very terms of the social have expanded to include an international network of economic and cultural flows of products and influences. Pike’s insight fits very well with Fredric Jameson’s theorization of a new cultural logic of late capitalism characterized, as he so famously claimed, by the absence of affect, the preference for surface, not depth, the absence of interiority, the effacing of history, a sense of placelessness and a diffused experience of space.<sup>36</sup> It is hard to think of a cultural theory that could be any more isomorphic with the textual practices of Egoyan’s early films.

The shift from a political to an aesthetic discourse is obviously bound up with the way the films in the New Wave departed from the tradition of social realism, an aesthetic that had historically tended to distinguish the practice of English Canadian directors from the formally inventive leaders of Quebec national cinema in the 1960s and 1970s. Formal reflexivity in New Wave films however, has to be distinguished from the disjunctive strategies of a Gilles Groulx or a Jean Pierre Lefebvre where the exploration of the language of cinema is specifically allied with the collective project of imagining a nation, of “becoming other” in the Deleuzian understanding of the struggle of a minority culture to evoke the “Idea of a people who are ‘not yet’ but perhaps are in a process of actualization.”<sup>37</sup> In Egoyan, in particular, formal reflexivity is reconstituted as a narrative thematic and extended meditation on the alien-

ating effects of an image culture where memory, social control and erotic fantasy are technologically mediated through electronic imaging. In part, the enormous critical success of Egoyan's early films can be accounted for by the manner in which he tapped, not only into prevailing theoretical debates around image culture, but into the experiential zeitgeist of generation of young metropolitan subjects weaned on television and the "society of the spectacle." Like Stephen Soderberg's *Sex Lies and Video*, another smash art cinema hit of the late eighties, the rapturous response to *Family Viewing*, *Speaking Parts* and *The Adjuster* (1991) had clearly been incited by the films' then completely precedent setting acknowledgement of the pervasiveness of video imagery in everyday life.

From the very first then, the orientation of New Wave films was internationalist both in the manner in which the films implicitly address an international art cinema audience, and also in the way in which they are devoid of any explicit referencing of a national allegorical tradition, a tradition in English Canada which had been precipitously marginalized by the new political regime of inter-continental trade agreements. The Toronto New Wave defined its own response to the reality of globalization and to the globalizing monolith of American mass commercial cinema by modeling itself around a European art cinema with an aesthetic preference for critical distance, multi-levelled reflexivity and ironic detachment.<sup>38</sup> Branded with a bold sense of style and distinctive authorial thematics, preoccupied with the themes of urban alienation and the disappearance of authenticity from mass mediated consumer societies, the films of the New Wave addressed an international taste habitus and niche market forged through its cinematic connoisseurship and cosmopolitan affinities. This mediating influence of European art cinema

is not only apparent in the way in which leading directors such as Egoyan and Rozema are frequently recruited to work on the European canon (Rozema's *Mansfield Park* [1999], Egoyan's *Krapp's last tape* [2000] and his opera work) but in the fact that many of the films are partially financed through deals with European television, an exhibition context in which they are seamlessly inserted.

Egoyan's remark concerning his disinterest in North American audiences, however, needs to be placed in context. Despite their critical and international success, New Wave films were confronted with the fate that had met all English Canadian cinema: the inability to break into the domestic market in more than a marginally significant way. Luminously present at festivals, retrospectives and cinémathèque screenings, the fact remained that with the exception of *Exotica* and *Mermaids*, most of the commercial runs of New Wave films met with only modest success. While Quebec art cinema has consistently proven to be immensely popular with Quebec audiences, Denys Arcand's *Invasions Barbares*, for example, garnered almost six million dollars in domestic box office,<sup>39</sup> an indigenous national-popular cinema in English Canada remains relentlessly elusive, given the predilection of the majority of spectators for Hollywood cinema. Quebec cinema, of course, has the advantage of being produced in a minority language and of addressing a domestic audience with a far more homogeneous experience of national culture. This has not only allowed the emergence of popular genre films in the province, as Pierre Véronneau discusses in his piece, but even its elite art cinema, a cinema which traditionally has a more circumscribed appeal, has been able to address and participate in the articulation of a distinctive communal experience in a manner that clearly has an immediate and deep resonance for audiences. English

Canadian cinema, by contrast, has always to contend with the reality of a surrounding culture that is far more deeply scored by globalizing centrifugal influences and that is vibrantly disaggregated and diverse.

Indeed, what replaces a sense of national distinction in the Toronto New Wave is a kind of metropolitan cosmopolitanism. In contrast to the preceding generation of English Canadian art cinema in which rural and regional communities formed a point of identification, the setting of New Wave films is almost exclusively urban. Even the films of Bruce McDonald which bear a certain continuity to the earlier films of Shebib and Owen in their evocation of regional landscapes, find their humour in the displacement of metropolitan subjects into rural environments and small town settings. As much as it was for the hapless heroes of *Going Down the Road*, however, the city continues to evoke an extreme ambivalence where the menace of sudden acts of violence or sexual predation is offset by the possibility of a passionate relation with a chance encounter—two of the narrative trajectories in *Exotica*. In almost all instances, the city is represented as a largely dystopian landscape, soulless and alienating. Traditional communal bonds of family, ethnic identity, religion or social affinities have been shattered and, increasingly, market relations and the exchange of money mediate the procurement of intimacy and connection (phone sex in *Family Viewing*, lap dancing in *Exotica*, sex for insurance adjustment in the *The Adjuster*). The prevailing sense of estrangement and ambivalence towards the city are, of course, classic symptoms of modernity as writers from Georges Simmel to Michel de Certeau have observed. Indeed, the sexual abuse and murder of a child, the precipitating narrative event in *Exotica* echoes, if not deliberately quotes, one of the pinnacles of German modernity, Murnau's *M*. Let me

suggest, however, that one of the distinctions between the classic modernist response to urban massification and the instrumentalization of social relations and the response prevalent in films of the Toronto New Wave has to do with the way in which the representation of deep space and an epic sense of narrative are replaced by a persistent flattening of space and a contrived and fragmented narrative form.

While conscious of the extent to which I am generalizing a complex and diverse body of work, I would like to propose, however, that one of the distinguishing characteristics of the New Wave films is the frequent replacement of an explicit geographic reference to place by a representation of a highly stylized, abstract and artificial space. The strip club in *Exotica*, the censorboard offices in *The Adjuster*, the 'white room' in Rozema's second film from 1990, the circus in *When Night is Falling* (1995), the excessively art directed interiors in Podeswa's *The Five Senses*, the set in Vincent Natali's *Cube* (1997) where space takes shape as the concretized extrusion of a paranoid psyche, all of these examples exemplify a very different signifying regime. The tendency to abstraction is equally present in Clement Virgo's *Rude* (1995), where the city of Toronto is recast as the symbolic incarnation of Babylon, an apogee of Western decadence and oppression. As with the empty, deserted streets and supermarket in *Last Night*, space is continuously transformed into something that is at once generic, unmarked by any specificity of location and that is also profoundly *unheimlich*, uncanny—resistant to any sense of belonging or home. While Egoyan in particular exploits this sense of the *unheimlich* in his frequent use of motels, hotels, airports and anonymous places of transit, the voiding of representational space is similarly inscribed at the end of *I've Heard the Mermaids Sing* in the images of a

fantasized, surreal nature and in the art pieces which are finally revealed to be nothing more than luminous emanations of light, surely a reference en abyme to the representational strategies of the whole.

In a particularly evocative essay, "Walking in the City," Michel de Certeau theorized how the encounter with modernity, as it is embodied in the subject's passage through the spaces of the city, might be thought about with reference to the reformulation of a relationship between space and narrative. Within the contours of the modern city, that is, space can no longer be thought in relation to ontological meaning or tradition for it has become fundamentally pluralized, fractured and disconnected. In that context, "perambulatory figures," as de Certeau writes, substitute "journeys with the structure of a myth"—linear movements through time and bounded space—for a random and meandering passage through disparate spaces linked only through proximity or simultaneity.<sup>40</sup> One has only to think of how many of the New Wave films employ a mosaic structure of intertwining or parallel narratives to understand how their formal articulation provides a commentary on the experiential shape of urban life, Podeswa's *Eclipse* (1995), perhaps being the most paradigmatic case in point. Based on *Reigen* written by Arthur Schnitzler in 1900 and filmed by Max Ophuls as *La Ronde* in 1950, Podeswa's film once again tropes on an earlier encounter with modernity as it follows contemporary fragmented narratives of impulse and desire as characters meet and copulate in a chain reaction.

If the prevailing tone of anomie and alienation link New Wave Films to certain European modernist traditions, they are also distinguished from that tradition by their insistence and representation of the multicultural reality of contemporary metropolitan life. Almost all of Egoyan's



films to greater and lesser degrees reference the history of diaspora, a reference most frequently embodied in the characters played by his Armenian born wife, Arsinée Khanjian. Egoyan, however, is too much of an unrepentant ironist to deliver the association between woman, cultural authenticity and ethnicity without sharp quotation marks, as in the second half of *Calendar* (1993) where the abandoned husband's awkward flirtations are deflected by the chain of ethnic women. And while the representation of cultural diversity occasionally feels programmatic such as the native character in *The Adjuster* (Raoul Trujillo) or Rachel Crawford as the black circus performer in *When Night is Falling*, the fact remains, as Peter Harcourt has remarked, that the New Wave films have ushered in a profound paradigm shift in relation to the representation of race.<sup>41</sup> Far more significant than liberal casting prerogatives, however, has been the emergence of directors like Deepha Mehta, Srinivas Krishna and Clement Virgo whose first features *Sam and Me* (1991) *Masala* (1993) and *Rude* have irrevocably taken ethnic identity beyond a progressive acknowledgement of multiculturalism into the elaboration of a new cultural imagination. Above all, this imagination is transnational in scope and connected to international flows of cultural and political influence. *Rude*, for example, deploys a range of citations and intertextual references drawn from Rastafarian symbolism, the novels of Toni Morrison, the hood films of Spike Lee and John Singleton, to the music of international black expressive culture. Mehta's most powerful films, following *Sam and Me: Fire* (1996) and *Earth* (1998) were produced and filmed in India and rework classic Hindu myths to produce a powerful feminist critique of patriarchy and ethnic fundamentalism. Srinivas Krishna's *Masala*, set in the sari shops and suburban homes of Toronto's South Asian community

delivered an absolutely unprecedented subversive deconstruction of both state multiculturalism and the diasporic nostalgia fed by kitschy Bollywood musicals and spiritual advice delivered through the VCR.

Along with the films of John Greyson, Bruce La Bruce or Lynne Fernie, whose cinematic practice has been informed by the political mobilization of the gay and lesbian movement and by the evolution of an international queer cinema in the eighties and nineties, the work of diasporic filmmakers in Toronto provides a crucial permutation on the formulation of a metropolitan cosmopolitanism. Positioned in opposition to the managerial and economist designs of globalization as it is embodied in consumer mass culture and magnified in influence during the period of the eighties and nineties, the work invents a new transnational imaginary grounded in international political affinities and oppositions.

### **Post script**

I began this essay hypothesizing a historic beginning to the New Wave, let me conclude by hypothesizing the beginning of an end. In 1998, the federal government launched an Advisory committee on Feature Film Policy that set about to re-evaluate federal funding priorities in the context of the increasing challenges of globalization and in the face of the continued marginality of English Canadian Cinema in indigenous markets. In spite of the fifteen years of international critical success of New Wave films, the Committee, exclusively made up of representatives of the film industry, concluded that the model of auteur-driven art cinema was no longer viable. In its place, their report advocated for commercial large budget features intended to successfully compete in the

international market and to, minimally, gain a larger toe hold in the domestic (a target of 5% of total domestic box office was bandied about). By the next year Telefilm's funding priorities were significantly adjusted so that the largest proportion of the Feature Film Fund would be allocated exclusively according to market criteria and the producer's past history of success at the box office. Auteur driven, aesthetically audacious films were capped at a budget of one million and would receive a much smaller percentage of the total. The results over the past few years have been predictable: a narrowing of the diversity of expression as large budget, producer led films such as *Men with Brooms* (2002) or generic formulas such as the eight-million dollar *Foolproof* (2003, William Phillips) monopolize allocations. While the shift in policy direction aligned federal cultural priorities with developments in the global political economy of the film industry, which have included intensified corporate mergers and vertical integration as well as cutthroat competition over international markets, it has yet to prove its infallibility in commercial matters. *Foolproof*, for example, was garrulously touted as the next commercial breakthrough of Canadian cinema. Despite spending an unprecedented three million dollars in promotion, the film proved to be an unmitigated box office disaster. Disaster also befall the most recent film projects of Bruce McDonald (*Picture Claire*, 2001) and Atom Egoyan (*Ararat*, 2002), both produced within this new policy regime by Robert Lantos, the most vocal corporate advocate of industrial cinema. *Picture Claire*, in fact, was funded as part of a multi-million dollar deal Lantos had brokered when he left Alliance following its merger with Atlantis in 1998. As producer led initiatives, both films were accorded record high budgets (12 million dollars each) and both represented drastic (and

as time would prove, fatal) generic leaps for each director. In the end, neither film lived up to its critical or box office promise. *Picture Claire* was only released on video, and, along with *Foolproof*, has been largely credited with driving the last nail into Alliance-Atlantis's commitment to feature film production.<sup>42</sup> *Ararat*, despite winning five Canadian Genies, has done only modestly at recoupment and has largely been considered a critical failure.

There is no doubt that prestige directors like Egoyan and McDonald will be protectively cosseted from these failures and their ability to secure funding for future projects will always be assured. What remains in doubt is whether the creative and social environment that nurtured these directors at the beginning of their careers will be in place to facilitate the next cycle of maverick new wavers.<sup>43</sup>

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> The first was Seth Feldman and Joyce Nelson's eds. *Canadian Film Reader* (Toronto: P.Martin Associates, 1977).

<sup>2</sup> Piers Handling, "Introduction," *Self Portrait: Essays on the Canadian and Quebec Cinemas*, eds. Pierre Véronneau and Piers Handling (Ottawa: Canadian Film Institute/Institut canadien du film, 1980), p.viii.

<sup>3</sup> Michael Dorland, *So Close to the State/s, The Emergence of Canadian Feature Film Policy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), p.7.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, p.7.

<sup>5</sup> Peter Harcourt, "1964: The Beginning of a Beginning," *Self Portrait*, p. 67.

<sup>6</sup> It is unclear when the term "Toronto New Wave" first appeared in print but it is clear the moniker had been used informally in critical circles since the early nineties. A short overview published in the summer edition of *Take One* (vol V, no.12) in 1996 by Marc Glassman and Wyndham Wise uses the term to refer to a list of filmmakers who "came to cinematic maturity during the early 1980's." Their list of the members is more generous and expansive than the one I am forwarding which, for reasons of space and coherence, excludes documentary directors like Ron Mann, Holly Dale and Janis Cole and Janis Lundman and gives only very short shrift to the extraordinary work of Peter Mettler or the sustained innovations of key experimental filmmakers like Phil Hoffman and Mike Hoolbloom. Because so much of my essay is focused on the way in which the New Wave was packaged, publicly perceived and publicized by state funding apparati, most of my remarks will focus on the far more traditional and restricted triumvirate of Egoyan, Rozema and McDonald. As Cameron Bailey remarked in his overview of the New Wave ("Standing in the Kitchen All Night, A Secret History of the Toronto New Wave," *Take One* (vol 9, no.28, Summer 2000): "if I missed you, consider yourself name-checked in spirit." My periodization is also different from the one developed by Bailey and Glassman/Wise. Bailey marks the commencement with Egoyan's *Next of Kin* in 1984; Glassman/Wise throw the date back even further to Peter Mettler's *Scissere* in 1982 and Ron Mann's *Imagine the Sound* (1981) and *Poetry in Motion* (1982).

<sup>7</sup> David McIntosh, "Vanishing Point: Proliferations, Purifications and the Convergence of Canadian and Mexican National Cinemas," *Canadian Journal of Film Studies/ Revue Canadienne d'études Cinématographiques* (vol.10 no.2 Fall, 2001), p. 70.

<sup>8</sup> Patrick Lowe, "Enter the Beaver: Lee Demarbre and the Debut Can-Fu," *Take One* 46 (June-Sept. 2004), pp.13-17.

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<sup>9</sup> Patrick White, "A Personal History," *Cinema Canada* (no.52, Jan-Feb, 1979), p.26.

<sup>10</sup> Bruce Elder, "A Tentative Analysis," *Cinema Canada* (no.52, Jan-Feb, 1979) pps.28-29.

<sup>11</sup> Including Janis Lundman, Bay and James Weyman, Mark Achbar, Peter Mettler and Adrienne Mitchell.

<sup>12</sup> I realize the term is contentious. Bruce Elder has argued very convincingly that Canadian experimental film of the 1970s, because of its investment and use of the photograph (*Wavelength, One Second in Montreal*) might be considered more post-modern than classically modernist. I'm using modernism in a larger sense to stand for the impulse towards formal purity and where the work of art is positioned as transcendent and set in absolute opposition to popular consumer culture and narrative.

<sup>13</sup> See William C. Wees, "Let's Set the Record Straight": The International Experimental Film Congress, Toronto 1989," *Canadian Journal of Film Studies* (vol.9 no.1, Spring, 2000), p. 103.

<sup>14</sup> Thomas Elsaesser, "Images for Sale: The 'New' British Cinema," *When Fires Were Started* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), p.61.

<sup>15</sup> The possible and notorious exception is of course Bruce McDonald who upon accepting his \$25,000 prize money for the City Award at the Toronto Festival of Festivals, quipped that he would use it to buy a large chunk of hash, a provocation that only reinforced his branding as the "bad boy" of Canadian cinema.

<sup>16</sup> See Cameron Bailey's "Standing in the Kitchen All Night," *Take One* (Summer, 2000).

<sup>17</sup> Wyndham Wise, "A History of Ontario's Film Industry 1896 to 1985," *Take One* (V.9, no.28, 2000), p.35.

<sup>18</sup> Quoted in "A History of Ontario's Film Industry 1896 to 1985," Wyndham Wise, *Take One* (vol.9 no.28, 2000), p. 35.

<sup>19</sup> Broken down, the 1991/92 Statistic Canada report on the industry revealed that the tv market accounted for \$139 million of the total generated in this sector, pay-tv was responsible for \$34 million, the theatrical market brought in \$30 million and the non-theatrical sector, which includes both advertising agencies and sponsored productions by government and educational institutions, accounted for \$264 million or 45% of total industry revenues in 1991/92, of which \$137 million came directly from ad agencies and \$49 million from government and educational bodies.

<sup>20</sup> Gail Henley, "Wayne Clarkson's risky business: Ontario feature filmmaking takes the OFDC challenge," *Cinema Canada* (March, 1986), p. 17.

<sup>21</sup> Michael Dorland, *So Close to the States*.

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<sup>22</sup> Mark Raboy, "Communication and Globalization: A Challenge for Public Policy," *Street Protests and Fantasy Parks*, ed. David R. Cameron and Janice Gross Stein

(Vancouver: UBC Press, 2002), p. 121.

<sup>23</sup> Ron Burnett, "Atom Egoyan: An Interview," *CineAction!* (no.16, May 1989), p. 41.

<sup>24</sup> That positioning was aided and abetted by the national media. Despite the prolific nature of his output and his regular use of the same actors (Gabrielle Rose, Arsinée Khanjian, David Hebley) Egoyan's work never launched an actor as a national star. Indeed, the only star to emerge from this firmament, with the intense collaboration of the national media in Canada, was the director himself. Splashed onto the front cover of national newspapers at Genie time, while his partner Arsinée Khanjian's designer gown given the same scrupulous attention normally reserved for a Hollywood star, waving to the crowds from the Croisette or upon entrance to the Academy Awards when *The Sweet Hereafter* was nominated for best script and best foreign film, the director and his beautiful wife are consistently constructed as the embodiment of glamour and style. The circulation and maintenance of this image of the auteur as star has obviously been central to the constitution of the New Wave as a public entity.

<sup>25</sup> Wyndam Wise, "A Feature Interview with Alexandra Raffé," *Take One* (vol. IV, no.10, Winter 1996), p.16

<sup>26</sup> Ontario Production Levels, Chart 3, [http://www.omdc.on.ca/docs/050\\_res/060\\_sta/0400\\_chart4.shtml](http://www.omdc.on.ca/docs/050_res/060_sta/0400_chart4.shtml)

<sup>27</sup> Ted Magder, "Canadian Film and Television Producers Association," <http://www.museum.tv/archives/etv/C/htmlC/canadianfilm/canadianfilm.htm>

<sup>28</sup> See Marc Raboy, "Public Consultation in the Canadian Broadcasting System," *Canadian Journal of Political Science/Revue canadienne de science politique* (vol. xxviii:3, September, 1995).

<sup>29</sup> *The Business of Culture, A Summary of the Advisory Committee on a Cultural Industries Sectoral Strategy* (Toronto: Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Recreation, 1994), p. 3

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Even Nunavut now has its own film commission

<sup>32</sup> Ron Burnett, Ibid, p. p.14.

<sup>33</sup> Ian Angus, *Topia* (no.10, Fall 2003), p.30

<sup>34</sup> Stephen McBride, *Paradigm Shift, Globalization and the Canadian State* (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 2001).

<sup>35</sup> David Pike, "Canadian Cinema in the Age of Globalization," *CineAction!* (Issue 57, March 2002), p.7.

<sup>36</sup> Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991).

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<sup>37</sup> D.N. Rodowick, *Gilles Deleuze's Time Machine* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1997) p.156

<sup>38</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction, A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1984), p. 33.

<sup>39</sup> See Appendix.

<sup>40</sup> Michel de Certeau, "Walking in the City," *The Certeau Reader*, ed. Graham Ward (Manchester: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), p.109.

<sup>41</sup> Peter Harcourt, "Faces Changing Colour Changing Canon, Shifting Cultural Foci within Contemporary Canadian Cinema," *CineAction!*(no.45, February, 1998).

<sup>42</sup> On December 11, 2003, Alliance Atlantis announced that it was moving out of feature and documentary production and concentrating on its broadcast sector and distribution. As part of this move it closed down two historic production houses: Salter Street in Halifax and documentary production house Great North in Vancouver, laying off more than 70 staff.

<sup>43</sup> The author would like to thank her superb research assistant, Yvonne Ng.



## **Part 2**

# **Regional Aesthetics**



## CHAPTER 7

### Made in Saskatchewan!

**Christine Ramsay**  
**University of Regina**

“We may not be the flakiest folks in the world, but one company hopes that we’re close. Hill Top Research is hoping to expand its dandruff research into Regina—based on our similarities to Winnipeg, which has the dubious distinction of being the Dandruff Capital of the World.... “We’re very much like Winnipeg in terms of the [cold] weather that causes dandruff,” said Wendy Lazer, site director for the company’s Winnipeg lab.... The company will be in Regina April 3 and 4, and will have trained dandruff evaluators and “a world class grader” counting flakes and evaluating scalps. The process takes an hour or two, and the company pays \$25 a head.”<sup>1</sup> (*Regina Leader Post*, March 17, 2004.)

Hallelujah! Now dandruff—profitable dandruff at that—can be added to the long list of distinctions made in Saskatchewan. Like Louis Riel. The RCMP. Tommy

Douglas and the cooperative movement. Allan Ladd as Sgt. Thomas O'Rourke, the tight-lipped Mountie in Raoul Walsh's 1954 "northern" classic, *Saskatchewan*. Girl Guide cookies. The Saskatchewan Arts Board. The Dunlop Art Gallery. The Regina Five. Gordon Tootoosis. Gordie Howe. Medicare. Joni Mitchell. Leslie Nielsen. Pamela Wallin. Dick Assman. Wheat.

But what most Canadians don't realize—and many Saskatchewanians haven't quite internalized—is that it's been a long time since wheat farms drove the provincial economy. Industry continues to diversify; the population is more urban than rural;<sup>2</sup> and, in fact, Canada's "prairie heartland" now has a growing culture industry: film and television production has generated an average of approximately 22 million dollars each year since 1990, and several productions are winning important international and national prizes. In 2001 Regina's Partners in Motion won an Emmy Award for Best News and Documentary for *13 Seconds: The Kent State Shootings* (2000, Chris Triffo). And with the opening of the state-of-the-art Canada Saskatchewan Production Studios in 2002, the icon of the grain elevator is making way for new images on the horizon that are putting the Queen City on national maps. In the past two years, Saskatchewan's film and television community has begun to enjoy recognition throughout Canada with such hit productions as the television series *Moccasin Flats* and *Corner Gas*,<sup>3</sup> and the narrative feature *Falling Angels* (2003, Scott Smith). The latter, produced by Regina's Minds Eye Pictures and based on the novel by Barbara Gowdy, "was nominated for six Genies overall—more than any other Saskatchewan movie in the 24-year history of the awards."<sup>4</sup> It won two: Best Art Direction and Best Original Song. And it has earned a place on Canada's Top Ten list for 2003.<sup>5</sup> As Minds Eye CEO and

film entrepreneur Kevin DeWalt says, "It just goes to show when you've got the proper facilities to make films and the proper tools to use, you can churn out really good quality.... Whenever you're in this region of the country and you win awards up against films from Toronto and Montreal, people will definitely stand up and notice.... Going forward Minds Eye will continue to finance feature films.... Whenever you get recognized by your peers you hope that starts to get a little bit easier."<sup>6</sup>

If there's one thing on God's green earth as sure as death and taxes, however, it's that making narrative feature films in Anglo Canada is a difficult enterprise.<sup>7</sup> And while DeWalt's tenacity in his belief in a film Industry for Saskatchewan is legion—as Minds Eye recently scrambled to secure approval for corporate restructuring to deal with financial problems, he put his own house up as collateral to fund *Falling Angels*<sup>8</sup>—he is not immune to the challenges that have dogged the production of features in his home province and across Canada since the inception of Telefilm in 1984. In fact, his comments subtly betray those challenges in his desire to produce work of quality that the centre will notice. This paper attempts to survey the landscape of Saskatchewan features since Telefilm through the dual lenses of the challenge of quality on the one hand (i.e. the desire to make art or at least something of quality versus merely "churning out" commercial product) and region on the other hand (i.e. the difficulty of representing a place and establishing legitimacy in the context of what Noreen Golfman, in "Imagining Region: A Survey of Newfoundland Film," has called the "tired" and "naive" but nevertheless persistent centre-margin binary that continues to characterize the regions as backward and undeveloped in the colonialist "grand narratives of Canadian cultural life").<sup>9</sup> What I want to do is to try to

bring these dual issues of aesthetics and regionalism into focus together with a view to understanding the tensions and complexities, but also appreciating the uniqueness and achievements, of the emergent Saskatchewan film scene.

As Alan Blum reminds us, the grammar of “scenes” as social formations is relatively untheorized. But what is clear is that questions of modern urban identity, the idea of public place/public space, and the complex notion of a shared and at the same time contested imagined community are paramount to understanding scenes. Where Blum’s focus is on established scenes as master categories that organize the most cosmopolitan centres (i.e. the gay, music, drug, art, tango, or rave scenes of Berlin, Paris, New York, or London),<sup>10</sup> my interest is in a more modest and developing yet nonetheless important scene at the margins. “The scene accomplishes its work by making a site the occasion of a project,” Blum writes, where “the encounter with place” becomes “a test” for all those who fall under the scene’s and the project’s spell.<sup>11</sup> In this case, Regina—with its leading-edge soundstage designed for commercial filmmaking sharing turf with the dozens of independents, documentary producers, and more experimentally-inclined artists who run the Saskatchewan Filmpool Cooperative—is the privileged site of the increasingly high-stakes, highly charged, and highly contested political and aesthetic, corporate and creative, project of inventing and sustaining a provincial film scene.

The Regina film and video scene began with the founding of the Saskatchewan Filmpool Cooperative in 1977. As I have suggested in an article commemorating the Filmpool’s 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary, what started as a small service for equipment access sponsored by the Canada Council soon became the centre for film production in

Saskatchewan throughout the 1980s. Don List's lively documentary about Tommy Douglas, *Folks Call Me Tommy* (1982) became the first capital cost allowance film to originate in the province. Over time, the Filmpool's activities have expanded to include disbursement of production funding, equipment access facilities, resource material, workshops, and the sharing of knowledge among members. The Filmpool also exhibits Canadian independent work, sponsors tours of members' films across Canada, and brings filmmakers, critics, and scholars to Saskatchewan. Now boasting 150 members, the Filmpool thrives as a non-profit artist-run centre with a public service mandate to "support, encourage and assist independent visionary filmmaking in Saskatchewan."<sup>12</sup> In September 2005, Filmpool hosted the first Regina Festival of Cinematic Arts, attracting as jury members such illustrious names in Canadian filmmaking as Alanis Obomsawin and David Rimmer.

Out of the energy generated by the Filmpool, the Saskatchewan Motion Picture Association (SMPIA) was established in 1985 to advance the production, promotion and appreciation of motion pictures in the province. In 1989 it became a Provincial Cultural Organization (PCO) supporting film financing through Saskatchewan Lotteries. It now funds eight member organizations: Filmpool, Flicks: Saskatchewan International Children's Film Festival, Friends of the Broadway Theatre, Paved Art and New Media, Queer City Cinema, Regina Film & Video Students Society, Soil Digital Media Suite, and the Yorkton Short Film & Video Festival. Also in 1989 the Saskatchewan Communications Network (SCN) and SaskFilm were formed. As Saskatchewan's public broadcaster, SCN's mandate is to contribute to the social, cultural, and economic well being of Saskatchewan people by providing access to

education and information through the creative use of technologies. In addition to its international programming SCN produces and broadcasts several series dedicated to the representation of Saskatchewan cultures, including *Prairie Night at the Movies*, which has screened many of the films under discussion here. SaskFilm is the provincial funding agency for film and television. Its mandate as the provincial film commission is to administer the provincial film employment tax credit program, to encourage co-production relationships between Saskatchewan and other national and international producers, and to manage the Canada Saskatchewan Production Studios, which offers four state-of-the-art soundstages and the complete array of pre-production, support, and post-production facilities.

SaskFilm also publishes the "Saskatchewan Producers List," which in 2003 lists 39 production companies, 25 of which are based in Regina. The largest of these include Independent Moving Pictures, Minds Eye, and Verité Films in drama; Cooper Rock Pictures, Four-Square Productions, Robert Long, Partners in Motion, and Westwind Pictures in documentary; Tyndal Stone Media in new media; and the Filmpool in art and experimental film. However, not all of them are lining up to make work in the soundstage. The 11.5 million dollar venture, which was funded by the provincial and federal governments, the City of Regina, and the Saskatchewan industry after a decade of lobbying on the part of DeWalt and SaskFilm CEO Valerie Creighton, among others, has been controversial. Some independent feature filmmakers suggest that they don't need that kind of infrastructure to create quality work; many documentarists have no need for a soundstage; and the idea of being a branch-plant for Hollywood television movies rankles a lot of people. Moreover, as the soundstage sat mostly dark for several months after its



grand opening, charges of another government “white elephant” wasting tax-payers’ hard-earned money were bandied about in the local press. However, the success of Verité Films’ Genie-winning *International Story Studio* and, now, *Corner Gas*, as well as Minds Eye’s *Falling Angels* and Terry Gilliam’s *Tideland* (2005), which premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival this fall—all shot on the soundstage—may be reversing the tide. A gala evening was held on the set of *Corner Gas* in February 2004 to celebrate its success, and Premier Lorne Calvert was there with bells on to give the nod to the burgeoning Saskatchewan film and television scene.

As with any scene, the fundamental problem of ambiguity presents itself. But this ambiguity, says Blum, is the “symbolic order” of the scene itself, where “the scene is the myriad courses of action directed to solve the problems released by such ambiguity, including the ethical collisions and forms of collectivization which it inspires.”<sup>13</sup> This question of ethical collisions and forms of collectivization is very relevant to any discussion of filmmaking in Regina. Obviously the forms of collectivization that inspire DeWalt are primarily corporate. The current Chair of the International Co-production Committee of the Canadian Film and Television Producers Association, he’s a regional producer interested in the national and international economics of financing feature films and television series for whom peer recognition necessarily involves being noticed by the centre: Toronto and Montreal certainly, but also Los Angeles. Minds Eye kept an L.A. office for a few years in the late 1990s, and its bread and butter in the narrative feature department has been mainly co-produced movies-of-the-week touting B-list Hollywood stars such as Andy Garcia, Jennifer Beals, James Caan, Timothy Bottoms, and Patrick Swayze.<sup>14</sup> And

on that note is exactly where the ethical collisions come in—and they come publicly, in writing, and with a vengeance.

In “What’s Wrong with Sask Film?” independent writer/director/producer Robin Schlaht is clearly identified with forms of collectivization that have more to do with valuing the specificities of place, regional cultural expression, and local community identities on the margins than what he would call eking out a half-life imitating tired trends from somebody else’s “centre.” One of the Filmpool’s most accomplished filmmakers, he interrogates what he sees as the provincial film commission’s dangerous “drift toward the production of profit-driven, culturally-vacant programming” to the exclusion of the “many projects struggling to emerge in this province which are home-grown, innovative and culturally relevant.”<sup>15</sup> Criticizing SaskFilm’s increasing attention to the deal at the expense of the merit of the final product, Schlaht makes a sitting duck of *Decoy* (1995, Vittorio Rambaldi), a Minds Eye film starring Peter Weller:

But where the commercial production companies and, especially, SaskFilm tend today to miss the mark, is in their pursuit of dramatic mega-projects. For instance, how “Decoy” (an aptly-named wooden imitation of U.S. action pictures, made with significant SaskFilm funding) ever qualified for support ... I’ll never understand. The show’s only substance is aggression, and its contribution to the community and our social character can be only negative, its impact upon the hearts and minds of the community a numbing one [...] So I feel compelled at least to ask what is wrong with SaskFilm? Why have it and the Department of Municipal Government chosen to

dismiss Saskatchewan culture rather than celebrate it? We need to ask if cookie-cutter TV product is really worthy of imitation. I think we can do much better – and in the process we can engage and enrich our community, and present a reflection of the Saskatchewan spirit and social character to our community, to Canadians, and to the world.<sup>16</sup>

While Schlaht's critical assessment of *Decoy* is probably fair as well as funny, it would be unfair to dismiss DeWalt as *only* driven by profit motives or, worse, *completely* colonized by lowbrow Hollywood taste. When Minds Eye started out "We took on each new project for a reason," he has said, "not for money but to learn something."<sup>17</sup> So, even though *Decoy* admittedly enabled the company to learn how to handle guns on set and blow things up Hollywood-style, the film DeWalt dreams of making, and on which Minds Eye jealously guards the option, is *The Englishman's Boy*, based on Saskatchewan writer Guy Vanderhaeghe's Governor-General's Award-winning novel: "It's a terrific – and expensive – script...and we're not going to do it cheaply. It's a passion of love for us, because of the quality of the book, and the Saskatchewan connection."<sup>18</sup> With this project, as with *The Tommy Douglas Story* (a four hour CBC mini-series directed by John N. Smith (*The Boys of St. Vincent*) and starring Michel Therriault, Don McKellar, and R.H. Thomson, which wrapped production in summer 2005), De Walt clearly hopes to achieve the kind of quality and cultural relevance that Schlaht is calling for, as well as produce a commercial success.

Thus, while forms of collectivization indeed clash on the Regina film scene, it is there that they also converge – as Blum suggested they would – in the encounter with *place* as a testing ground for "the spirit of Saskatche-

wan" as an imagined community. Perhaps what this ethical-aesthetic collision between taste cultures reveals is that Saskatchewan is no different from any other place as the forces of homogenizing globalization, international media economies, philistinism, and the risks of laying a few eggs now in the hope of making a better soufflé later, bear down in real ways on living cultures as they struggle for recognition and are variously embraced and resisted in their self-representations.

The question of Saskatchewan as a *place* is central to any understanding of the Regina film scene and the diverse work it's actually producing. To consider this question is to enter what Rob Shields, in *Places on the Margin: Alternative geographies of modernity*, calls "cultural systems of space in which places are ranked relative to each other." We live in a signifying system of "overall spatialization: a modern geomancy," he writes, "in which one's "spatiality" is fundamental to one's relation to the world, and "places or regions mean something only in relation to other places as a constellation of meanings." This social spatialization is a process of cultural production that has a "mediating effect" which juxtaposes "social and economic forces, forms of social organization, and constraints of the natural world" to create "place-images" that are charged with emotional content, mythical meanings, community symbolism, and historical significance. Place-images are the myths and metaphors we live by in the various regions. They emerge out of the modern system of spatial divisions and hierarchies that ground our national perception (centre-margins, near-far, civilized-natural) and, since they often come about by the oversimplification, stereotyping, and labeling that are part of everyday discourse, they can easily become "hypostatized" signifiers of the "essential character" of a place,

despite obvious historical changes and developments in its nature.<sup>19</sup>

Thus, places are marked in and by broad cultural systems of social spatialization in which nation states fragment the real into parcels, creating margins, peripheries, regions, hinterlands around a centre valued as superior. "The social 'Other' of the marginal and low cultures is despised and reviled in the official discourse of dominant culture and central power while at the same time being constitutive of the imaginary and emotional repertoires of that dominant culture."<sup>20</sup> Centre and margins are enabling conditions. Thus, in the spatial logic of inclusion and exclusion that has historically created the mythical meanings of Canada and its regions, "Saskatchewan" is both hinterland and heartland: socially peripheral (i.e. a cultural wasteland; the Big Empty; or, to borrow a popular metaphor about the American mid-west, "fly-over" between the important action on the east and west coasts in Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver), yet at the same time symbolically constitutive of official Canadian identity (i.e. the images of the hearty farmers of Canada's breadbasket who helped build the nation in the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century toiling among the gently swaying fields of endless wheat and sun-drenched skies fetishized in the CBC's Canadian Heritage Minutes; the RCMP inevitably polished and at attention at every official function on Parliament Hill; or the eternal interpellation in the national discourse of Saskatchewan as the birthplace of Canada's cooperative movements, social values, and national identity, evidenced most recently with the crowning of Tommy Douglas as CBC television's The Greatest Canadian in 2005). While Shields' focus is on how the dominant cultural space-myth of "the Canadian Nation as the True North Strong and Free" historically developed

out of the economic and political interests of Southern Ontario ideologues, and the ways in which it continues to mask and promote regional exploitation by uniting East, West, and South through “North” as our shared patrimony,”<sup>21</sup> I want to adapt his theoretical model to an analysis of the shift from the older, hypostatized regional space-myth of “the Prairie” to the newer regional space-myth of “the New West” in order to understand the social spatialization of Saskatchewan and Regina as *places* or *place-images*, and the narrative feature films that have been produced in this province as representations of its imagined community.

Saskatchewan’s history is intimately tied to Canada as an exciting modern enterprise in nation building. European immigrants poured into its neatly engineered quadrangle of opportunity at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, inspired by the utopian idea of Canada being advertised in literature and poetry, such as *Songs of the Great Dominion*, and later in magazines and the scenic travel films produced by the Canadian Pacific Railway. In his introduction to *Songs of the Great Dominion*, W.D. Lighthall spoke about Canada with what Eli Mandel has called tones of enthusiasm worthy of any Board of Trade Chairman: “[Lighthall’s] immediate contribution to images of prairie man, I suppose, is this: ‘Her Valley of Saskatchewan alone, it has been scientifically computed, will support eight hundred millions.’”<sup>22</sup> By the time it entered Confederation in 1905, the province boasted a growing population of almost 300,000, building a monstrous legislative building to accommodate the coming multitudes to the breadbasket of the world. Prospects were rosy for settlers in the pastoral prairie heartland of Canada – until the collapse of the wheat markets, the devastating drought and depression of the dirty thirties, and the taint of communism as

the farmers and miners organized to protect their interests. Out of these experiences, Henry Kreisel argues, emerged a prairie “state of mind” characterized by two polarities: “Man, the giant-conqueror, and man, the insignificant dwarf,” always humbled by a hostile landscape that threatens to defeat him.<sup>23</sup> Thus the “extraordinary sensation,” particularly for Saskatchewan people of European descent, of “confinement within a vast and seemingly unlimited space,” and an imprisoned spirit or Puritan inner paralysis paid as “part of the price exacted for the conquest.”<sup>24</sup> Indeed, while Saskatchewan has certainly had important successes as a “Modernist project”—having achieved mechanized agriculture by the 1940s, and the legacies of Medicare and the Regina Five in the 1950s and 60s—by 1950 the population had clearly begun to stagnate, the people’s utopian faith in belonging and contributing to something big called Canada was dissipating into entrenched Western alienation, the shame of the residential school scandals and systematized racism was beginning to loom on the horizon, and Saskatchewan began to feel more like the graveyard of Confederation than its heartland.

In *Saskatchewan* (2002)—which film critic Tom McSorley has called a beguiling and richly rendered “sliver of regional autobiography”—Regina expatriate Brian Stockton captures the profound melancholia and sense of loss of potential and abandonment that the place seems to conjure now in his own and in the popular Canadian imaginary (despite the cultural and economic changes iterated above). Not only is *Saskatchewan* a film “about the power of origins,” McSorley writes, “it also suggests the complexity and subtlety of how places form us in ways that are at once clear and obscure.”<sup>25</sup> Stockton, who now lives and works in Toronto, uses experimental video and

documentary techniques to poetically meditate on his origins—both personal and provincial. Flowing slow-motion abstract impressions of a seemingly endless and unpeopled landscape of golden wheat captured from a distance through the window of a moving car are juxtaposed with quick cuts of his own hands unfolding a provincial map accompanied by a whimsical voice-over that he uses, along with a green marker, to trace his family's move south from Battleford to Regina. Grainy home movie footage of himself and his younger brother growing up in the Queen City is then counterposed to textual sequences that document the sad stagnation of the province's population throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century (from 999,000 in 1930 to just over one million today)—made even more decisively melancholic by the languid tones of *The Supers* laid over the soundtrack. Yes, Stockton seems to lament, Lighthall's 799 million others did not materialize. And, come to think of it, the province *is* accomplished by an odd feat of modern scientific engineering that seems ironically prophetic: if you squint the right way, it seems to be shaped like a coffin! But what's even more ironic is that the film enjoyed an unusually loud buzz in the *Perspectives Canada* program at the 2003 Toronto International Film Festival, seeming to prove Shields' argument about the phantasmagoric appeal of a hypostatized "prairie wasteland" to the imaginary and emotional repertoire of the achieved centre and its colonized margins—which raises interesting questions in terms of the history and development of Saskatchewan narrative features pre and post Telefilm, especially in light of the effects of the *new* space-myth of the New West as it has gained and continues to gain purchase in Western consciousness in the last two decades.



When the editors of this volume invited me to contribute to this new, updated portrait of Canadian narrative cinema, they asked me to cover the development of features on “the prairies” since Telefilm—a regional *faux pas* almost on par with confusing a Newfie with a Maritimer! I said I’d be willing and able to write about Regina—but Winnipeg, Calgary, and Edmonton? “They’re so far away!” I exclaimed. “Have you looked at a map lately?” I laughed. “Have you read a newspaper other than *The Globe & Mail*?” I teased. “Have you heard the debates about the New West?”

As Robert Wardhaugh suggests in his introduction to *Toward Defining the Prairies*, a collection that emerged from the “Defining the Prairies” conference held at the University of Manitoba in September 1998, the traditional definitions of the prairies, “‘where place has overwhelmingly been defined in narrow, deterministic terms, as ‘the land’ or the natural physical environment,’ are no longer adequate.” New social and political definitions of the Canadian West are emerging that offer a “powerful reconstructed notion of place,” deconstructing old paradigms of “landscape, environment, nostalgia, and idealism” through the newer historical forces of “provincialism, communication technology, cultural change, and globalization.”<sup>26</sup> Gerald Friesen concurs with Wardhaugh that in the past decades a New West region has coalesced around changes in the western economy, governments, and the cultural and communication contexts of everyday life. In “Defining the Prairies; or, why the prairies don’t exist,” he argues that “[t]he view that there are two regions between Ontario and the Pacific, the Prairies and British Columbia, should be replaced by a new political reality and cultural perception—a single Lake of the Woods-to-Vancouver Island region. The case for a single

West rests upon recent studies in psychology, reading, and opinion formation. It also relies upon popular culture and the media" which capture the living outlines of "a new and distinct functional region, a 'political West.'" As such, he says, it is high time to "leave behind the imagined prairie region" as a nostalgic gesture to sentimentality, to times past, to ideas of the hinterland based in old and increasingly irrelevant Ontario-centric social identities.<sup>27</sup> However, in "Growing Up on the Prairies," Gilles Hebert offers a more existential account that insists on preserving some sense of the essential differences of "the Canadian prairies" — Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta. "The appropriateness of collecting these three provinces into a monolithic whole and calling it the prairies is curious," he writes: "It would be consistent given the eternal Canadian polemic with respect to the prairies, for the old boys at the Bordertown Cafe, to figure that the very idea of the prairies was somehow concocted by some Ottawa politician or bureaucrat who had never actually seen the place. After all, few people have, entirely. It takes sixteen hours of non-stop driving to go from Winnipeg, Manitoba to Calgary, Alberta. The prairies, as a place, involve such a vast and diverse geography that most prairie people are only familiar with their local sub-region. Seventy percent of Manitoba is covered by trees and water. A great deal of Alberta is also covered with trees or consumed by the Rocky Mountains. To suggest that the prairies comprise a singular topographic profile has more to do with historical social economics than actuality. In fact, it can be argued that the broadly cast flat prairie construct lost much of its currency with the collapse of the agrarian economy some forty years ago. It is true that there are grain farmers working the land in each of the provinces but the differences, such as traditional voting patterns, may out

weigh the similarities between provinces. It is reasonable to assume that Gimli, Manitoba is as foreign as Houston, Texas to a second generation Vietnamese couple living in Regina, Saskatchewan."<sup>28</sup>

In any case I insisted that, while I could cover filmmaking in Saskatchewan, others would have to cover the *other* Western provinces—and thank god, Brenda Austin-Smith and Jerry White agreed to write pieces on their respective regions. But this got me thinking: Alberta has its Anne Wheeler and Gary Burns, and Manitoba its Guy Maddin and John Paizs, while Saskatchewan has yet to produce a narrative feature filmmaker with a sustained vision and track-record. “Why is that?” I asked myself. Feeling rather overwhelmed by the pessimistic mood of Stockton’s film and the dire statistics on the out-migration of Saskatchewan youth to Alberta and Manitoba as well as points further west and east—including our best and brightest young filmmakers, such as Stockton himself—I worried that maybe Alberta and Manitoba indeed have moved on as pioneers of the New West, leaving poor old Saskatchewan, the province perhaps most strongly identified with the historical discourse of “prairie” and its associations with the (hinter)land, to stagnate, along with any potential it might have had as the “heartland” of anything. But, reminded of the very different kinds of energy currently emerging out of the Regina film scene in all its permutations (international co-productions, commercial movies-of-the-week, independent art films, documentaries, and new media projects, as well as experimental work)—and inspired by Jason Wiens’ “The Prairies as Cosmopolitan Space: Recent ‘Prairie’ Poetry,” in which, given “the increasingly cosmopolitan character of the place,” he calls for a critical rethinking of the received paradigm of “prairie poetics” and its obsession

with the forbidding landscape as a “surrounding emptiness” –I will take my cue and make the case for understanding the culture of narrative feature filmmaking in Saskatchewan since Telefilm through a “re-reading of the region as an internally differentiated, cosmopolitan site.”<sup>29</sup>

Quoting Bruce Robbins, Wiens writes that with critical post-colonial thinking about the old centre-margin/universal-local binaries, the sense of “cosmopolitan” as a privileged Western “ ‘citizen of the world’ possessing ‘independent means, high tech tastes, and globe-trotting mobility’ ”<sup>30</sup> has shifted. Robbins suggests that after the influential work of anthropologist James Clifford, and in the new global context, cultures are being reconfigured as mobile, fluid, hybrid, inclusive – rather than distinct, isolated wholes. Thus, strict divisions between the “local” and the “cosmopolitan” –or regions and centres –no longer make sense and the myriad places where cultures struggle for identity across the globe can be better understood as the world’s “discrepant cosmopolitanisms.”<sup>31</sup> Paul Rabinow offers a useful definition of the cosmopolitan as “an ethos of macro-interdependencies, with an acute consciousness (often forced upon people) of the inescapabilities and particularities of places, characters, historical trajectories, and fates.”<sup>32</sup> Adapting these insights to “the prairies” as a cosmopolitan place or space, Wiens continues:

By figuring the prairies as a “cosmopolitan” space, I hope on the one hand to account for its predominantly urban character and increasingly diversified economic base, and the social and cultural transformations it continues to undergo as national and global migration patterns shift, but also to describe

how the “prairies” might be imagined and situated on a global grid: as a distinct cultural entity among a global assembly of similarly, though to differing degrees, diverse entities—what Bruce Robbins would term one of the world’s “discrepant cosmopolitanisms.”<sup>33</sup>

But in order to follow Wiens’ lead and reconfigure Regina and Saskatchewan—Canada’s quintessential “prairie heartland”—in the newer mode of one of the world’s discrepant cosmopolitanisms, Alison Calder suggests that we first follow Shields’ insights and perform a “social spatialization of place,” moving beyond the narrow geographical determinism of historical nationalist stereotypes in order to “recognize the prairies as socially constituted space, and to examine how the prairies come to mean, and what those meanings are.”<sup>34</sup>

In “Who’s from the Prairie? Some Prairie Self-Representations in Popular Culture,” Calder argues that the first step is to resist the impulse to perpetuate the dominant “negative images” of the prairies that persist in our popular culture (her examples are largely from literature) at the expense of new urban and cosmopolitan realities. “This popular prairie is a strange and paradoxical place,” she writes, “at once a weird, gothic landscape populated by alienated and malevolent rednecks..., and also a warm and decent place inhabited by honest, hard-working folks with good community values.... The popular prairie is primarily defined by its landscape, which, like its population, is seen as extreme.” Moreover, she observes, popular culture has insisted on placing the prairies resolutely in the past—in “a discourse of dust storms, deserts, and Bennett buggies” that defines us as “nostalgic,” “declining,” and “dependent” through images

of “regional passivity,” “victimhood,” and “aestheticized suffering.”<sup>35</sup> Along with this idealization of the rural past comes what Calder calls the romanticization of the landscape, a mystifying tendency that promulgates notions of a starkly populated wilderness that excludes people. This “middle of nowhere” stereotype clearly represents a debilitating self-image skewed by the perspective of the colonialist centre. Resisting this tired and increasingly naive stereotype by telling our diverse experiences from our own perspective as the centre of a discrepant cosmopolitanism means we will create new images of “the prairie” in popular culture that are “as complicated, messy, and vibrant as prairie culture itself.”<sup>36</sup>

Wiens concurs, suggesting that what this obsession with the prairie landscape as the Big Empty—absent of people and devoid of meaningful histories and contemporary lifeworlds—does is that it “de-privileges domestic space, elides the geographic diversity of the three provinces, ignores the region’s increasingly and overwhelmingly urban character, and posits a facile understanding of the relationship of geographic place to art.”<sup>37</sup> And, I would add, negates the very distinct and different flavour of Aboriginal experience of the prairie as place and space. Thus, a shift of critical focus from old poetic notions of the prairie region as wasteland to new discrepant cosmopolitan notions of the prairie as an “internally differentiated” and “ideologically contested” discursive social space—one articulated by questions of “gender, class, and ethnicity”<sup>38</sup> as well as geography—will enable us to read contemporary Saskatchewan, and the new place-images of its various cultural scenes, and lifeworlds, differently.

In the case of the narrative feature film scene, we can trace the regional prairie-poetic pastoral stereotype in most of the pre-Telefilm Saskatchewan features of note:

*The Drylanders* (1963, Don Haldane); *Paperback Hero* (1973, Peter Pearson); *Alien Thunder* (1974, Claude Fournier); and *Who Has Seen the Wind* (1976, Alan King). All are stories that Calder might describe as arguably part of a “white male ethos” and its popular pastoral prairie poetic that invites prairie people to continue to “cling to an artificial, land-based nostalgia that locates us and our place firmly in the past.”<sup>39</sup> Moreover, all are stories of the regions told, more or less, by the centre—whether the NFB or the CFDC.<sup>40</sup> However, an important difference is that with *Who Has Seen the Wind* came producers, directors, and crews from the east who actually helped to jump-start indigenous narrative feature filmmaking in Saskatchewan—as did the efforts of German expatriate Jean Oser. An Academy Award winning editor for *A Light in the Window* (1953) who worked with such cinematic luminaries as G.W.Pabst, Max Ophuls, and Jean Renoir, Jean Oser is considered the father of filmmaking in Saskatchewan: Oser arrived in Regina in the early 1970s, lured from New York City by his friend Peter Small to take a position as a professor of Film Studies and Film Production at the University of Regina. With characteristic eccentric vision and good humour, he began to refer to the Queen City as a “quiet resort town,” and it became his new Baden-Baden as “the world famous and worldly editor reinvented himself, taking on a new role as a truly public intellectual who inspired a generation of what he himself fondly refers to as prairie ‘film nuts.’”<sup>41</sup> A celebrated mentor and dear friend of the Saskatchewan film scene, Oser died in 2002 at the age of 94 as Professor Emeritus of the University of Regina and holder of a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Saskatchewan Arts Board. As a consultant on *Who Has Seen the Wind*, Oser was instrumental in helping six Regina film students to

get work on that project which, in turn, inspired them to make their own work. Thus the Saskatchewan Filmpool Cooperative was formed with its mandate, as mentioned above, to “support, encourage, and assist independent visionary filmmaking in Saskatchewan.”

Throughout the 1980s, a fledgling Saskatchewan film scene began to take shape with Zale Dalen’s *The Hounds of Notre Dame* in 1980, and the first truly home-grown theatrical narrative feature, Gerald Saul and Brian Stockton’s *Wheat Soup*, in 1987.<sup>42</sup> While Gerald Horne suggests that *Wheat Soup* “captures the stark beauty of the prairie landscape,”<sup>43</sup> I would describe the film as decidedly more edgy and ironic. Eschewing the prairie nostalgia of *Who Has Seen the Wind*, *Wheat Soup* ushered in a distinctively *Saskatchewan* prairie postmodern cinema, offering an absurdist underground take on life on the flatlands with a self-reflexive postmodern nod to the global cosmopolitan cultural contexts of Beckett, T.S. Elliott, Godard, samurai films and Bugs Bunny. Its shoestring budget and student film aesthetic aside, the film is important as an amusing insiders’ critique of central Canadian colonialism and ignorance of the regions, as dumb farmers who can’t read or ride bicycles trade wheat for used appliances, wheat poachers get their just deserts, and television-addled urban agoraphobics who foolishly venture out into the prairie wasteland are struck down by flying anvils.

With the formation of SaskFilm in 1989, a critical mass of narrative features has begun to emerge in the last fifteen years from Regina’s various producers—most notably Minds Eye, Heartland Motion Pictures, and Verité Films—and Saskatoon’s Edge Entertainment.<sup>44</sup> While most of them have been forgettable yet economically profitable movies-of-the-week (whether annoying dross for Schlaht, or important training grounds for DeWalt), several are



interesting for their distinct Saskatchewan flavour, such as *Conquest* (1997, Piers Haggard), Schlaht's *Solitude* (2000), *Now & Forever* (2000, Bob Clark), *Falling Angels* (2002), and *The Pedestrian* (2003, Trevor Cunningham). These are films that imagine community in ways more characteristic of the discrepant cosmopolitanisms of "the New West" and its attendant contexts, intertexts, and pressures of urbanization and globalization than of the stereotypes of the pastoral "prairie poetic." These are films which, rather than imagining Saskatchewan with the hypostatized colonizer's eye as the Big Empty—rather than apologizing for or feeling ashamed of the worlds they depict—simply assume that *real people dwell in real places* in the modern geomancy—like Munster or Conquest or Saskatoon or Regina—and then proceed to tell interesting stories of their experiences. Indeed, to paraphrase Calder, these narratives recognize and speak Saskatchewan as a diverse *socially constituted space*—whether *Solitude's* intimate ensemble drama about a monk and his crisis of faith as it parallels the crises of two women who have come to the monastery seeking retreat from the stresses of contemporary urban life; *Conquest's* romantic comedy about a displaced Quebec banker and a group of aging women who rediscover their zest for life with the help of a beautiful Australian globe-trotter disillusioned with big-city life; *The Pedestrian's* dark urban comedy about a shoe clerk's increasingly out-of-control foot fetishism; or *Now & Forever's* tragic love story set against the backdrop of white racism and told through a refreshing Aboriginal perspective—an "encounter with place" in Blum's sense that has always experienced the Saskatchewan flatland differently—as an embracing and nurturing homeland, rather than the hostile wasteland typically depicted by European immigrants.

With *Now & Forever* we are beginning to get new ethical and aesthetic “collisions” on the Saskatchewan narrative film scene—collisions emerging from new “forms of collectivization” and “social spatialization” as Cree people enter the discursive struggle for “the spirit of Saskatchewan” as an imagined community. Much like *Moccasin Flats* is doing in television, narrative features like *Now & Forever* are able to reveal the complexity of how cultural systems of social spatialization work in Canada as the dominant centres of regions (like Regina, Saskatchewan) in turn create *their* despised and reviled others, *their* abject regions—whether through actual places such as the urban slums of North-Central, or through the racial divide that has historically permeated social spaces (urban and rural) across the province. *Now & Forever* is important narrative filmmaking because of the way it offers a new Saskatchewan place-image with Aboriginal “emotional content,” “mythical meanings,” “community symbolism,” and “historical significance.”<sup>45</sup> John (a Cree man played by Adam Beach) and Angela (a naive aspiring actress with designs on Hollywood played by Mia Kirschner) are close childhood friends whose destiny as lovers is undermined by white racism. Ghost Fox (a Cree spiritual advisor played by Gordon Tootoosis) knows that destiny and tries to intervene. But Angela’s reluctance to face her love for John, and the psychopathic rage of her boyfriend T.J. (Gabriel Olds) as she begins to recognize it, make for a tragic conclusion. John and Angela die, but the film’s final montage re-imagines the prairie landscape from a decidedly Aboriginal perspective. It depicts the couple on screen-right, embracing in and enfolded by a living prairie landscape, rather than dwarfed and abstracted against a bald horizon line. While the film itself could be criticized as overly earnest and melodramatic in parts, it is

nonetheless very interesting for the way it refuses the ideological happy ending of couple formation that would let the reality of racism in Saskatchewan off the hook (the embrace is ultimately revealed as a fantasy since the couple is dead) while bringing Cree anti-racist social values, mythology, and heritage clearly to the fore.

And so it seems that at this moment the Saskatchewan narrative film scene is coming of age—taking an interesting turn away from the popular white male prairie ethos and its stereotype of the overwhelming and inhospitable landscape that has historically tended to dominate the province's self-representations, toward the perhaps darker but in many ways richer contemporary place-images and themes of the urban centres—images and themes such as white racism in *Now & Forever*, foot fetishism in *The Pedestrian*, and family dysfunction in *Falling Angels*. The latter has proven itself a made in Saskatchewan success by any standard, notable for the buzz it received at the 2003 Toronto and Vancouver Film Festivals<sup>46</sup> and then for going on to share the year's Top Ten billing with the likes of Allan King's *Dying at Grace* (2003), Denys Arcand's *Les Invasions barbares* (2003), Guy Maddin's *The Saddest Music in the World* (2003) and Mark Achbar's *The Corporation* (2003). In Smith's black comedy the Field family struggles through the 1950s and 1960s harbouring the dark secrets of infanticide and alcoholism against the background tumult of the Cold War and Vietnam as the domineering patriarch and ex-army man Jim (Callum Keith Rennie) intimidates his depressed wife Mary (Miranda Richardson) into submission while his three daughters eventually find the strength to challenge their parents' pathological denial and demand the truth. Set in suburban Toronto and Niagara Falls but shot in Regina and Moose Jaw—an interesting scenario, from

Wiens' perspective, on Regina as a discrepant cosmopolitanism as it critically foregrounds rather than "de-privileges" domestic space and refuses a "facile understanding of the relationship of geographic place to art" by telling an Ontario story from a Saskatchewan perspective and, in so doing, turning the old trope of the centre speaking about the margins on its head — *Falling Angels* is new and original Saskatchewan filmmaking. Like *Now & Forever*, it creates contemporary and vibrant place-images from here, adapting Saskatchewan's endless horizon and breathtaking sky to new metaphoric purposes as a housebound wife falls from grace — literally — from her suburban rooftop against a dark prairie dawn. Like *Now & Forever*, it marks a watershed in Saskatchewan filmmaking, bringing together De Walt's quest for popular films of quality with Schlaht's demand for artistry and intelligence from the Regina film scene. As the nation seems to be noticing with the success of *Moccasin Flats*, *Corner Gas*, and *Falling Angels*, something more than wheat is getting made in Saskatchewan — by something more than flakes.

From the perspective of the Regina film scene "the spirit of Saskatchewan" seems to be on the cusp of exciting changes as it opens itself to the process of "worlding" in Gayatri Spivak's sense — to the potential of smaller localities to express their sense of public place/public space/imagined community/agency/identity in the global cultural field as they constitute their unique part in "'making up' the face of the planet."<sup>47</sup> As the Aboriginal population grows increasingly stronger and more vocal, and as more films emerge from an increasingly diverse, rich, and internationally connected artistic and industrial cultural scene, the old place-image of Saskatchewan as a stagnant and undeveloped backwater in the colonialist grand narratives of Canadian cultural life won't go unchal-

lenged. And internationally renowned auteurs like Terry Gilliam are helping in that regard. Asked why he settled on Saskatchewan as the location for his next film *Tideland*, the 63-year-old director of wild, dark fantasies ... replied, "Why not? The world is rushing to Saskatchewan these days, it's a hotbed of cinema." At a press conference in Toronto Gilliam said he was initially "terrified" about the prairie province's "infinite horizon of flatness beyond flatness," but changed his mind after seeing the Qu'Appelle Valley. "The countryside's incredibly beautiful and spare, and they gave us a lot of money," said the director.<sup>48</sup> Moreover, as Jennie Punter reports, Gilliam's "deemed labour" contract required that he mentor a Saskatchewan resident: "Over the course of production, four young filmmakers shadowed the man who was not only the creative genius behind such films as *Time Bandits*, *The Fisher King*, and *Twelve Monkeys*, but also a member of Monty Python's Flying Circus. How cool is that?"<sup>49</sup>

So, with *The Tommy Douglas Story* and Gilliam's innovative take on the prairie gothic—*Tideland* shows "a precocious young girl who creates a surreal fantasy world to escape a childhood of neglect and hardship" at the hands of heroin-addicted parents<sup>50</sup>—perhaps DeWalt and Schlaht are both beginning to get their wishes as commercial films of cultural significance to Saskatchewan, and art films of global cultural significance, are being funded and getting made. Who knows? Maybe one of Gilliam's shadows on *Tideland* will emerge as Saskatchewan's Guy Maddin or Patricia Rozema. As Golfman says, apropos of St. John's and the Newfoundland film scene, the future looks interesting. As we now say here, in the discrepant cosmopolitan centre of Regina, Saskatchewan, the future looks wide open.

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Jana G. Pruden, "Dandruff Research: We have lots of flakes," *Regina Leader Post* March 17, 2004, A1.

<sup>2</sup> For an overview of the forms of economic diversification taking place in Saskatchewan in recent years—from mining, oil and gas production, industrial cluster development, and particle physics through environmental industries, information technology, and film and multimedia production, see "Land of Opportunity: Whatever stereotype of Saskatchewan you hold, set it aside. This Prairie province has grown up," *The Globe and Mail*, May 13, 2003, 61-68; and Roy MacGregor, "A province ready for its close-up," *The Globe and Mail*, December 24, 2004, A4.

Regarding the question of urban prairie culture, see Angela Hall, "Shift focus to urban West, researcher urges," [www.leaderpost.com](http://www.leaderpost.com), November 24, 2001. Hall is reporting on remarks made by Roger Gibbins, a political scientist at the University of Calgary and head of the Canada West Foundation, at "Rural Canada: Moving Forward or Left Behind?," a conference held in Regina, November 22-24, 2002: "The rural face of the agrarian 'old West' is fading, Gibbins noted" as the 'new West' emerges, a landscape dominated by cities. "The decline of the rural population has been 'steep and relentless,' while the remaining rural West is losing its distinctiveness, he said. Gibbins cited public opinion data that showed little difference of opinion between rural and urban communities. The physical isolation of the rural West has been reduced by better roads and social separations are bridged by telephone access, common media sources, and emerging information technologies.... 'If the broadband promise is fulfilled, the result will be to shrink the remaining space between the urban and rural West,' he said. 'It may no longer make sense to rhapsodize about rural values.'" See also Roger Gibbins and Sonia Arrison, *Western Visions: Perspectives on the West in Canada*, Peterborough: Broadview, 1995.

<sup>3</sup> *Moccasin Flats* is a gritty "hood" series that explores the harsh realities for many Aboriginal youth living in North-Central Regina. Dillon (Justin Toto) wants to leave North-Central to attend university, but his love for Sarah (Kristin Friday), a sex trade worker trying to escape a violent pimp, keeps him tied to the ghetto. Produced by Toronto's Big Soul Productions and funded in part by Telefilm, *Moccasin Flats* is the first dramatic television series in North America to be created, written, produced, and performed by Aboriginals (see John McKay, "Moccasin Flats Makes History" *Kingston Whig Standard* Nov 10, 2003, 24). Based on the critically acclaimed short drama of the same name that wowed audiences at both Sundance and the Toronto International Film Festival in 2002, *Moccasin Flats* began as an

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initiative to train Aboriginal youth in the film and television industry. Screened on Aboriginal People's Television Network and Showcase, the series has just wrapped its third season and includes veteran actors Gordon Tootoosis and Tantoo Cardinal in an otherwise young and relatively inexperienced cast of actors from North-Central. See [www.turtletrack...2003/co\\_big2003.Mocassin\\_Flats.htm](http://www.turtletrack...2003/co_big2003.Mocassin_Flats.htm).

*Corner Gas* is a CTV comedy series set in a gas station in the fictional town of Dog River, Saskatchewan. Produced by Regina's Verité Films and starring Saskatchewan-born comedian and Gemini nominee Brent Butt, the show has struck a cord with both audiences and television critics. Seen by over 1 million viewers per week since its February 2004 debut, it has been described as "soft, cuddly and wonderful TV without being dumb" by the *Globe & Mail*; and "absolutely gut-wrenchingly, nose-streamingly funny" by the Halifax *Daily News* (see John Doyle, "Canadian Experience: Talking Canadian" (Television Program Review) *Globe & Mail* January 29, 2004, R2; and Lindsay Brown, "Corner Gas hits all the right funnybones," *Daily News* January 18, 2004, 35). Butt plays Brent LeRoy, the owner of a corner gas station called Corner Gas, which he has taken over from his parents Oscar (Eric Peterson) and Emma (Janet Wright). Butt co-writes the series with *This Hour Has 22 Minutes* alumnus Mark Farrell and, as Lindsay Brown suggests, *Corner Gas* is proving that it's now "time for Eastern Canada to defend its title as the funniest part of the country" (35).

<sup>4</sup> Tim Switzer, "Local film wins two awards," *Regina Leader Post* May 4, 2004, B2.

<sup>5</sup> See [www.torfilmfest.org](http://www.torfilmfest.org).

<sup>6</sup> Switzer, "Local film," B2.

<sup>7</sup> See Michael Spencer and Suzan Ayscough, *Hollywood North: Creating the Canadian Motion Picture Industry*, Montreal: Cantos, 2003. See also Michael Dorland, *So Close to the State/s: The Emergence of Canadian Feature Film Policy*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998, and Ted Magder, *Canada's Hollywood: The Canadian State and Feature Films*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993.

<sup>8</sup> Susan Tolusso, "Case Study: The Making of *Falling Angels*," *Montage* (Winter 2004), 28-31. 31. For an overview of DeWalt's career with Minds Eye see Christine Ramsay and Ken Wilson, "Minds Eye: Kevin DeWalt's Big Adventure," *Take One: Film and Television in Canada*, n36 (March/April 2002), 31-33.

<sup>9</sup> Noreen Golfman, "Imagining Region: A Survey of Newfoundland Film," *North of Everything: English-Canadian Cinema Since 1980*, ed. William Beard and Jerry White, Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2002, 46-59. 47.

<sup>10</sup> Alan Blum, "Scenes," *Public: Cities/Scenes*, ed. Janine Marchessault and Will Straw, 22/23, 7-35. 8.

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<sup>11</sup> Blum, "Scenes," 32.

<sup>12</sup> Christine Ramsay, "Who Has Seen the Public Intellectual?: Jean Oser and His 'Prairie Film Nuts' Swimming at the Saskatchewan Filmpool," *Splice* 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary issue, (Spring 2002), 13.

<sup>13</sup> Blum, "Scenes," 33.

<sup>14</sup> Minds Eye actually began life in 1988 producing corporate videos, but DeWalt had always dreamed of making serious features after seeing the profound effect of Richard Attenborough's epic *Gandhi* (1982) on a Bombay audience (Ramsay and Wilson, "Minds Eye," 31-32). The "Saskatchewan Producers List" notes the following six Minds Eye features: *The Unsaid* (Tom McLoughlin, 2001), a "romantic thriller" starring Andy Garcia; *Something More* (Rob King, 1998), a "romantic comedy" starring Jennifer Beals; *Viva Las Nowhere* (Jason Bloom, 2001), a "dark comedy" starring James Caan; *Without Malice* (Rob King, 1999); *Murder Seen* (Rob King, 2000), a "psychological thriller," starring Callum Keith Rennie and Timothy Bottoms; and *Held Up* (1998), a "comedic *Dog Day Afternoon*." Minds Eye has also produced or co-produced several internationally successful television series, including *Myth Quest*, *My Global Adventure*, and *International Story Studio*.

<sup>15</sup> Robin Schlaht, "What's Wrong with SaskFilm?" *Splice* 6 (Summer 1996), 6-7. 6. Schlaht's prize-winning films include *Solitude* (2001), *The Heart Becomes Quiet* (1999), *Moscow Summer* (1996), *Sons and Daughters* (1994), and *The People in Black* (1992). Other current Filmpool filmmakers of note include Brett Bell, Jason Britski, Michael Crochietiere, Percy Fuentes, Leslea Mair, Lea and Simon Nakonechny, Jason Nielson, Dianne Ouellette, Gerald Saul, Brian Stockton, Leif Storm Caldor, Ian Toews, and Mark Wihak.

It's interesting to note that this aesthetic and ethical clash in Canadian film culture between grass roots filmmaking and filmmaking by government policy—or between art and industry—was already foreseen by the executives who brokered the shift from the Canadian Filmmakers Development Corporation (CFDC) of the 1960s and 1970s to the Telefilm Canada of the 1980s and today. In *Hollywood North* Michael Spencer (who was the first executive director of the CFDC and is now a bonder for Film Finances Canada) writes: "The essence of the National Film and Video Policy was the new direction of government assistance to the film industry. Television would become the chosen medium and a new name for the expanded CFDC had to be found. 'Telefilm Canada' was a controversial choice at the time; a 'telefilm' was perceived as being not quite a real film" (175). In many quarters, it still is.

<sup>16</sup> Schlaht, "What's Wrong," 6, 7.

<sup>17</sup> Ramsay and Wilson, "Minds Eye," 32.



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<sup>18</sup> Ramsay and Wilson, "Minds Eye," 32, 33. Interestingly, the novel is about cultural intersections between Saskatchewan and Hollywood, as a cowboy star of the silent era finds himself caught up in the fraught history of colonialism, racism, and the murder and displacement of First Nations people in the Canadian west.

<sup>19</sup> Rob Shields, *Places on the Margin: Alternative Geographies of Modernity*. London and New York: Routledge, 1991. 3, 47, 57, 199.

<sup>20</sup> Shields, *Places on the Margin*, 5.

<sup>21</sup> Shields, *Places on the Margin*, 195, 197.

<sup>22</sup> Eli Mandel, "Images of Prairie Man," *A Region of the Mind: Interpreting the Western Canadian Plains*, ed. Richard Allen, Regina: Canadian Plains Studies Centre, University of Saskatchewan, 1973. 201-209. 202.

<sup>23</sup> Henry Kreisel, "The Prairie: A State of Mind," *Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada* v vi, series iv, section II (June 1968), 173.

<sup>24</sup> Kreisel, "The Prairie," 175, 179.

<sup>25</sup> Tom McSorley, "Saskatchewan," *Take One* (June-Sept 2003), 345.

<sup>26</sup> Robert Wardhaugh, "Introduction: Tandem and Tangent," in *Toward Defining the Prairies: Region, Culture, and History*, Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2001, 7.

<sup>27</sup> Gerald Friesen, "Defining the Prairies; or, why the prairies don't exist," *Toward Defining the Prairies: Region, Culture, and History*, ed. Robert Wardhaugh, Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2001, 22, 26.

<sup>28</sup> Gilles Hebert, "Growing Up on the Prairies," Unpublished manuscript, 1993.

<sup>29</sup> Jason Wiens, "The Prairies as Cosmopolitan Space: Recent 'Prairie' Poetry," *Toward Defining the Prairies: Region, Culture, and History*, ed. Robert Wardhaugh, Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2001, 152.

<sup>30</sup> Wiens, "The Prairies," 154.

<sup>31</sup> Bruce Robbins, "Comparative Cosmopolitanism," *Social Text* 31-32 (1992), 169-186. 181. This is exactly what Golfman is getting at in the case of St. John's, Newfoundland: "In many ways," she writes, "to live in this region of Canada in the millennium is to live in a postmodern laboratory, where the contradictory effects of social change and destabilization seem sudden and transparent.... The signifiers of the postmodern laboratory are as ubiquitous as the portable advertising marquees that dot the landscape of the region from Edmunston to Bonavista. These tacky black-plastic billboards line the highways and front confectionery stores, often announcing at once such seductive offerings as dried salt cod, worms, and *The Matrix*.... The global media industries reach everywhere, making the challenge of producing homegrown images especially daunting. Indeed, home is changing at an alarming and exhilarating pace" (46).

<sup>32</sup> Paul Rabinow, "Representations Are Social Facts: Modernity and Post-Modernity in Anthropology," *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of*

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*Ethnography*, ed. James Clifford and George E. Marcus, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986, 258.

<sup>33</sup> Wiens, "The Prairies," 153-154.

<sup>34</sup> Alison Calder, "Who's from the Prairie? Some Prairie Self-Representations in Popular Culture," *Toward Defining the Prairies: Region, Culture, and History*, ed. Robert Wardhaugh, Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2001, 91.

<sup>35</sup> Calder, "Who's from the Prairie?" 91, 92, 99.

<sup>36</sup> Calder, "Who's from the Prairie?" 98.

<sup>37</sup> Wiens, "The Prairies," 153.

<sup>38</sup> Wiens, "The Prairies," 158-159.

<sup>39</sup> Calder, "Who's from the Prairie?" 95.

<sup>40</sup> See G.S. Horne, "Interpreting prairie cinema," *Prairie Forum: The Journal of the Canadian Plains Research Center* 22:1 (Spring 1997), 135-151, *passim*. *The Drylanders* was the first English-language feature produced by the National Film Board of Canada. It tells an epic tale of two generations of the Greer family through "memorable prairie images" (Horne, 141) as they settle in Saskatchewan and struggle to survive bitter winters, scorching summers, drought, and the Great Depression. See also Kristian Moen, "The Polyphonic Prairies: The Creation and Recreation of *Drylanders*" *Canadian Journal of Film Studies* 10:1 (Spring 2001), 28-47. *Paperback Hero*, while decidedly more emotionally compelling and not without some critical irony, is also imbued with many of the stereotypes of the popular prairie pastoral. Shot in Delisle, Saskatchewan, it is a portrait of a small town "womanizing hockey player leading a fantasy life as a town gunslinger" (Horne, 142). *Alien Thunder*, filmed in Duck Lake, Saskatchewan, and based on a true story by W.O. Mitchell, casts Donald Sutherland as "a mountie chasing a Cree Indian accused of murdering a sergeant" (Horne, 142), while *Who Has Seen the Wind*, shot in Arcola, Saskatchewan, is a prairie boy's coming-of-age story set during the Great Depression and based on the W.O. Mitchell novel of the same name. While the latter has earned its reputation as a classic of Canadian cinema, Mitchell apparently dissociated himself from the former film, complaining that his work had been twisted beyond recognition into a typical Hollywood "good-bad guy western" (see Joan Beatty, "Onyx Film a Disappointment," *Saskatchewan Indian* 4:3 (March 1974), 27).

<sup>41</sup> See Ramsay, "Who Has Seen the Public Intellectual?" for a history of the importance of Jean Oser to the Filmpool and the larger Saskatchewan film scene (19, 14).

<sup>42</sup> *The Hounds of Notre Dame* is the story of Père Athol Murray, a renowned hockey coach at Notre Dame College in Wilcox, Saskatchewan in the 1930s and 1940s. "Funded in part by alumni of the college," Horne writes, "the film warmly remembers Père's rough language, anti-CCF sentiments and whisky drinking, as well as his strong resolve to make patriots of a motley

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collection of farm boys and small town hoods during the depression years” (“Interpreting prairie cinema,” 143). The film was shot on location in Wilcox, winning Thomas Peacocke a Canadian Film Award for Best Actor in 1981. In 1968 Murray received the Order of Canada, and in 1972 he was inducted into Canada’s Sports Hall of Fame.

*Wheat Soup*, Horne writes, “is a low budget feature” set in a “post-apocalyptic future” about “a farmer who has lost his land and wanders the prairie” (144). Shot in and around Regina by then University of Regina film students and Filmpool members Gerald Saul and Brian Stockton, the film took three years to make and earned several prizes at the Saskatchewan Film & Video Awards, including Best Film, Best Sound, and Best Cinematography (see Patrick Davitt, “Saskatchewan as nuclear wasteland,” *Leader-Post* Nov 19, 1987, F1).

<sup>43</sup> Horne, “Interpreting prairie cinema,” 144.

<sup>44</sup> In 2001 the Regina Public Library Film Theatre, Regina’s repertory cinema, sponsored an exhibition of Saskatchewan film posters curated by Brock Silversides. The show included posters from many of the films produced by these new companies, as well as pre-Telefilm offerings. See Brock Silversides, “A Brief Overview of Saskatchewan Film,” in “... a stranger comes to town: Historical Film Posters from Saskatchewan,” Regina: Dunlop Art Gallery, 2001.

<sup>45</sup> Shields, *Places on the Margin*, 57.

<sup>46</sup> See Alexandra Gill, “There’s art. Then there’s car crashes.” *Globe & Mail* October 8, 2003, R3.

<sup>47</sup> Robbins, “Comparative Cosmopolitanism,” 176.

<sup>50</sup> Punter, “Boom time,” R1.

<sup>48</sup> See “Tiff for Tat: It was flat, and full of money,” *The Globe and Mail* September 15, 2004, R1, 2.

<sup>49</sup> Jennie Punter, “Boom time on the Prairie,” *The Globe and Mail*, December 14, 2004, R1, R3.

<sup>50</sup> Punter, “Boom time,” R1.



## CHAPTER 8

### **Strange Frontiers: Twenty Years of Manitoba Feature Film**

**Brenda Austin-Smith**  
**University of Manitoba**

“Nobody knows a thing about Winnipeg, other than it  
floods.”

Noam Gonick

Manitoba draws a blank. Without an ocean, a line of mountains, or an official second language to mark its specificity, the province does not really register in the cultural imaginary of the country. It is eclipsed by both Saskatchewan and Alberta in the realm of prairie icons (cattle and wheat), and occupies the middle of Canada without being the centre of anything. Winnipeg has nevertheless emerged as an intensely creative site of film production over the last two decades, establishing itself as one of the country’s “minor” film cities.<sup>1</sup> While too disparate to be forced into thematic or formal coherence, the feature films of Manitoba made between 1984 and 2004 tend, as do many other films issuing from other provinces,

to align themselves with, or in opposition to, mainstream cinema in a regional reflection of the country's ambivalent attitude to commercial filmmaking. This is not surprising, given the political economy of feature production in Canada discussed by Madger, and more recently, Gittings.<sup>2</sup>

As has already been discussed elsewhere in this anthology, filmmaking in Canada is conditioned not only by the realities of Hollywood, but also by the often paradoxical interventions of provincial and federal governments who wish to foster both an independent Canadian cinema *and* a commercially successful one. It is a dream cinema of impossible regional universalism that would appeal to the generalized many through its representation of the local few. Expectations on the part of funders that Canadian films not only give expression to an ineffable Canadian identity, but also produce financial returns from circulation outside Canada only multiply the contradictory demands upon filmmakers. Successful Canadian features have an historically difficult time with distribution outside the country, and even domestic success isn't really very profitable, at least not until the films have gained circulation through "exhibition windows" other than first-run theatres.<sup>3</sup> Within this historical and economic context, the fascinating paradox of filmmaking in Manitoba is that over the last two decades it has managed to make a name for itself not through prairie realism, but through the experimental anachronism of many of its most well-known films, in which the persistent mythologies associated with its prairie settlement past (hard work, family and homesteading) are refracted in the stylized light of obsolete genres, if they are present at all.

The historical and local details of life in Manitoba inevitably form a lexicon for local filmmakers, but one often used in the narration of stories in which it is impos-

sible to name the setting with precision. This is not only a function of marketing concerns that render an identifiable Canadian location box-office death in the U.S., but also marks an interest in the placelessness of Manitoba generally, and Winnipeg in particular, as a form of cinematic potential. While this recalls Brenda Longfellow's reference to placelessness in the work of Egoyan in her chapter on the Toronto New Wave, the geographical non-specificity of Manitoba films cannot be explained satisfactorily as the representation of a generic, post-modern urban space. Rather it is more productively interpreted as a response to Winnipeg's polysemic potential as a location whose cultural/historical/social meaning is not yet fixed in the North American collective consciousness. Unlike Toronto, which *is* the ideal generic, post-national metropolis, Winnipeg still has the freedom to be anything filmmakers wish it to be. As Noam Gonick said to an interviewer about his representation of Winnipeg in *Hey Happy!* (2001), "I have the opportunity to make the city better. A filmmaker located in New York or L.A. doesn't have that luxury because there's so much popular imagination surrounding those places. But I don't have the same audience as Carol Shields and so I'm working with a blank slate. It's total freedom."<sup>4</sup>

Of course not all Manitoba features have taken creative liberties with the relationship between location and filmic vision. Several Manitoba features in the last twenty years have capitalized on the regionalism identified as a hallmark of Canadian cinema, presenting realist stories of maturation and romance set in recognizably rural landscapes, though in many of these, the representation of regional detail is rendered distant and poetic through nostalgia and period treatment. But many other films of this period have conventional prairie realism in

their crosshairs. These films are decidedly urban in sensibility, often excessively formalist in style, and largely uninterested in participating in the construction of a national cinematic identity. They are works of psychological rather than physical regionalism, immersed in states of mind, or expressive of sensibilities associated with melodrama or the gothic. This work resolutely resists the often tortured determination of reviewers and critics to see in it some essential, specific quality of "prairie-ness" or Canadian character, insisting instead on its relation not to nationality, but to a genealogy of filmic images.<sup>5</sup>

While the art cinema success of a director like Guy Maddin has brought much attention to the Manitoba film scene, reading Maddin's hothouse style as emblematic of Manitoba feature productions is an over-generalization perhaps caused, in part, by the close association of Maddin and other directors with the Winnipeg Film Group, tagged by *Cinema Canada* as the home of "prairie post-modernism." Many of the filmmakers whose short works earned the WFG its reputation for weirdness went on to make feature films later in that decade, aided substantially by their practical experiences as members of one of Canada's oldest filmmaking co-operatives (the Film Group was founded in 1974 by Rob Lower and Leon Johnston with funding from the Canada Council and the Province of Manitoba). In the introduction to a catalogue celebrating the Winnipeg Film Group's twentieth anniversary, Gilles Hebert addresses the ambiguous connection between location and content in the twenty-three short films chosen for the anniversary exhibition in ways relevant to some of the feature-length films also sponsored by the WFG. Hebert notes that it has been important for "most official culture Prairie Canadian films" to "maintain Winnipeg as an isolated anonymous city complete with its



own sense of remote confinement," and that many filmmakers seem "compelled to celebrate this romantic limitation." While the WFG filmmakers invoke the conditions of "social or cultural quarantine," writes Hebert, they do not mobilize isolation as an "identity production device." The displacement they narrate, Hebert continues, is resolutely their own rather than connected to conventional expressions of prairie disaffection and isolation.<sup>6</sup> Later in the same catalogue, Geoff Pevere makes a similar observation about the film group's productions throughout the 1980s, identifying them as among the first to express a sensibility reflecting a sense of place that was less geographic than cultural.<sup>7</sup> The vision of the Film Group in the 80s was one "steeped in various junk culture forms like TV, movies, comic books and pop radio."<sup>8</sup>

It is this air of an "overmediated sensibility" that Pevere sees in the work of John Paizs, known as the Film Group's first auteur.<sup>9</sup> There was no funding for features in Manitoba in the early 1980s, so Paizs had ingeniously crafted a "feature" out of three half hour linked short films, "Springtime in Greenland," "Oak, Ivy, and Other Dead Elms," and "The International Style," packaged as *The Three Worlds of Nick*. They were the first Winnipeg Film Group productions to be screened at the Toronto Festival of Festivals in 1984. Paizs' pop-culture obsessions had thus already made his work in short films notable by the time his first feature, *Crime Wave*, debuted in 1985. A film about the peripheries of filmmaking, *Crime Wave* is the story of Steven Penny, an ultra-quiet man (he has only one short phrase of dialogue) whose determination to make a "colour crime film" seems motivated in part by the absence of anything remotely dramatic in his own life. The story of Steven's struggles with plot structure (he can do beginnings and endings, but not middles) is narrated by

his pre-pubescent gal-pal Kim, who is thrilled to have Steven living upstairs in her parents' garage. Kim tries to help Steven overcome his perfectionism and writer's block, writing on his behalf to a script doctor who is actually a homicidal pervert. The first version of the film ends with Steven's safe return to the garage after a violent confrontation with the script doctor, a truck driven by a dog, and a streetlight. Transformed by this experience – the streetlight has been temporarily fused to his head – Steven is finally able to complete his script, and celebrates with Kim over cake. Dissatisfied with the film after its premiere at the Toronto Festival of Festivals, Paizs re-wrote and re-shot the final section of the film. The appearance of this second version of the film a year later caused some confusion, and the film faded from view after 1986.

*Crime Wave* hit a wonky nerve upon its release, and remains a cult favourite, its structural flaws and sharp changes in tone (from silly to threatening) part of its arresting effect. Its humour emerges not just from Steven Penny, the virtually mute, somnambulant hero, whose deadpan expressions contrast so hilariously with the overwrought antics of the characters from his many discarded scripts, but also from the framing device of Kim herself. She is linked by some critics to the naive narrators of Terrence Malick, but the strange friendship between Kim and Steven glances briefly at both Wenders' *Alice in the Cities* (1974) and Hitchcock's *Shadow of a Doubt* (1943). It is David Lynch, though, with whom Paizs is most connected in comically menacing sensibility and taste for the suburban surreal, for example, when Steven, preparing to cut a cake in celebration of his finished script, begins to raise the knife very slowly, it's point directed at Kim. Paizs's next directorial feature was *Top of the Food Chain* (1999), a send-up of 1950s alien invasion flicks,

filmed in Toronto. Brought in as a director because the writers had caught *Crime Wave* on late night t.v., Paizs did not have complete control over the production, but the finished film, made in Ontario, bears the traces of his benignly-twisted B-movie vision.

Paizs's example of low-budget eccentric success inspired many of the Winnipeg filmmakers of the mid-to-late 1980s, most importantly, Guy Maddin, who was cast in two of Paizs's Winnipeg Film Group shorts, and whose intense rivalry with Paizs informed the script of *Tales from the Gimli Hospital* (1988) Maddin's first feature. However, the retro imagination of Paizs and willed primitivism of Maddin were not the only styles cultivated among Winnipeg filmmakers at the time. Greg Hanec, also a Film Group member, wrote and directed two films, *Downtime* (1985) and *Tunes A Plenty* (1988). *Downtime*, the first Winnipeg film screened at the Berlinale, and described by local reviewer George Godwin in an article on Manitoba filmmaking in 1988 as "the best feature yet made here," is an episodic portrait of young, working-class city dwellers filmed in black and white, obviously influenced by Jim Jarmusch's *Stranger Than Paradise* (1983), that in the words of one critic, "predated the Generation X syndrome."<sup>10</sup> Its settings are corner stores, bare apartments, and laundromats. The main characters, unnamed for the most part, meet, exchange desultory remarks, and part, with very little in the way of plot or character development. Filmed in black and white, the film is sharply composed, rather formal, and often striking in its depiction of bleak interiors and depressing workplaces, as when the unnamed male character who repeatedly tries to get the attention of the attractive store clerk (even a half-hearted robbery attempt leaves her unmoved), is filmed crossing a hall in a telescopic shot that seems to hold him forever in shadow

as he walks toward the camera. Moments of understated humour emerge from the characters' rather mechanical interactions, as when one woman sitting beside another at a commercial laundry recounts a dream of finding a dead cat in the washer and being told by the proprietor to "just put it in the dryer," where it springs to life.

*Tunes A Plenty*, while made in a similar realist vein, is not as successful as *Downtime* in maintaining visual interest when its episodes become too shapeless, or in creating characters compelling enough to watch when the visuals become predictable. The same use of zooming appears here too in a shot of a man crossing a street and walking endlessly toward the camera, and colour stock seems intended to do the work of the more interesting set-ups and framing in the earlier work. *Tunes* also suffers from a more developed script about a rock band headed by a self-absorbed musician who would rather give up music entirely than play covers of other peoples' songs. Beautiful shots of trains and the big prairie sky are no match for the unsympathetic musician's hackneyed anguish ("What happens to my dreams? They just go into the air"), though the original music, written and performed by the actors, is excellent. The film sags badly as a story, but the laconic delivery of the characters, moving in an urban stupor punctuated by musical performances, is hypnotic.

Guy Maddin, the Winnipeg Film Group's most famous member, released his first near-feature length movie, *Tales from the Gimli Hospital*, in 1988, after appearing in John Paiz's short "The International Style" (1984), and after the production of his own experimental piece, "The Dead Father," in 1985. *Gimli Hospital*, which Peter Rist refers to as "[o]ne of the most daring and innovative of all Canadian first features,"<sup>11</sup> tells the lurid, murky

story of Einar and Gunnar, patients in a sanitarium who develop a murderous hatred of each other. Trading stories in the hospital, whose air is filled with straw, feathers, and never enough light, Einar and Gunnar discover that they have both been lovers of the lovely Snjofridur. Gunnar passed on the deadly plague to his young wife on their honeymoon, while Einar, stumbling upon her bier in the dark, made love to her corpse. The animosity between them drives the rest of the film, eventually locking the two men in an ungainly and incongruous buttock-wrestling duel. The theme of male rivalry seems shaped by Maddin's own history of romantic and professional competition with John Paizs, while the dead woman's body as vector of a still-virulent infection makes the film, for all of its humour, a disquieting picture of male communication over and through a lifeless woman. Though Snjofridur, being dead, can't be called promiscuous, her sexual availability to a rival anticipates other Maddin women like Narcissa in *The Saddest Music in the World* (2003), whose sexuality is detached from personal identity and released into nymphomania through the mechanism of amnesia.

John Kozak, an active figure in the Film Group, also released his first shortish feature, *The Celestial Matter*, in 1988. It is a film that Gene Walz describes as "uncategorizable,"<sup>12</sup> though despite this claim, Patrick Lowe, in his essay "The Winnipeg Film Group Aesthetic," describes this dramatization of an ecclesiastical trial of a 16<sup>th</sup> century scientist, Giovanni Foscarini, as a "pseudo science fiction/period piece."<sup>13</sup> Lowe notes that the film's focus on limited settings—the trial chamber and the scientist's prison cell—is intended to highlight the emotional tensions of the scientist's confrontation with his prosecutors, who accuse him of heresy in striving to build a spaceship from which to explore the "celestial matter" of

the moon. Kozak's "no frills"<sup>14</sup> approach to filmmaking produces an ambitious but rather ponderous meditation on authority and intellectual integrity in which characters trade paragraphs of dialogue, and there is no real emotional drama in the film, even though repeated shots of the moon, seen through Giovanni's cell window, are mesmerizing.

Though the myth of Winnipeg's bucolic isolation persists as an attractive explanation for the bizarre stylistic features associated with its film productions in the 1980s and into the 1990s, this media-friendly theme of deranged homesteaders mystifies the material conditions supporting the outpouring of work from the city. The notion of Winnipeg weirdness is more appropriately awarded to the short films of the Film Group rather than to the features released during this period, and obscures the productions of those within and outside of the Film Group who did not adopt what journalist Liam Lacey described as its aesthetic of "deadpan humour, a confused male protagonist, extreme obsessive behaviour, an often phantasmagoric environment, and surreal, often sickly effects." A more prosaic explanation for the number and kind of films produced in Manitoba from the late 1980s into the mid-1990s was the role of the NFB in film and television drama production, and the formation of the Cultural Industries Development Office (CIDO) in 1987.

In 1986 the NFB had sponsored the local production of an anthology of four, sixty-minute dramas about relations between Metis and white women at different historical periods, entitled *Daughters of the Country*. The production of the popular series marked an important moment in the development of the film industry in the province, providing directorial experience for Aaron Kim Johnston, Norma Bailey, and Derek Mazur, as

well as camera experience for cinematographers like Ian Elkin, all of whom went on to careers in filmmaking and production. CIDO was a federal-provincial partnership designed to promote the growth of the film industry in Manitoba. By 1988 CIDO was administering the programs of Film Manitoba (which had supported film-making since 1985), and was funding workshops in script development and sound training, as well as in production and marketing. As John Kozak explained at the time, this more reliable funding meant that filmmakers receiving money from the Manitoba Arts Council and the Film Group could now secure matching funding from CIDO, upping the budgets of first-time filmmakers to \$50,000 from less than \$1,000.<sup>15</sup> CIDO's approach to the development of a local industry, targeting its creative as well as its technical elements, had an immense impact over the next several years on the quality and quantity of local films, also encouraging those directors with more commercial ambitions than Paizs, Hanec and Maddin.

While many Manitoba features did take stylistic detours from the straight realist road, they did so, at least at first, not because of their conscious adherence to a tenet of prairie postmodernism, but as a byproduct of the political economy of film production in Canada, which makes most features, particularly those in the regions by new directors, marginal to the commercial mainstream. Like filmmakers all over Canada, those in Manitoba can choose to compete directly for attention and audience share with American products, or can decide to make features that have no intention of locking horns with Hollywood releases. Many filmmakers in Manitoba made the limitations of small-budget, small-city filmmaking — poor lighting, cardboard sets, wooden actors, stiff direction — into what were regarded by later viewers and critics as intentional stylis-

tic virtues.<sup>16</sup> John Paizs, for example, has admitted that his character in *Crimewave* didn't talk because he himself was a lousy actor and it was just easier not to say a word.

Among those directors with more conventional cinematic visions was Aaron Kim Johnston, whose first feature, *The Last Winter* (1990), wistfully shot by cinematographer Ian Elkin, was a successful example of local filmmaking in the Hollywood style of narrative realism. *The Last Winter*, a family-centred fable of a young boy's connection to his grandfather, and by extension, to the rural farmland left behind as the family moves to the big city, is perhaps the quintessential Manitoba film. It paints small town life in broad, nostalgic strokes: an outhouse is tipped over as a prank, the young protagonist has a crush on his cousin, and unruly neighbours dress in sheets, mount horses, and scare the nosy kids of the town away. The film's picturesque realism is mixed with a touch of the mystical, since young Will's visions of a beautiful white horse seem linked to a horse his grandfather watched as it ran from a burning barn many years previously. The film's dark, rich colour palette, its evocation of winter on the prairie, and its quiet, charming characters keep its treatment of the often devastating effects of rural-to-urban migration on prairie families, farms, and small towns in 1950s Manitoba lyrical and delicate.

1990 also saw the release of Guy Maddin's second feature, *Archangel*. The setting is World War I, and John Boles, an amnesiac Canadian soldier with one leg who cannot remember that his love, Iris, is dead, moves in with a local family in the snowy Russian town of Archangel, and becomes the love interest of Danchak, the mother of the family. Boles falls in love with Veronkha, the abandoned and forgetful new bride of Philbin, a similarly distracted aviator, and pursues her, convinced that she is really



Iris. Though characterized by the compositions and mannerisms of expressionist and Soviet formalist styles typical of Maddin, the unrequited passions of the characters recall the circuit of hopeless attachments in Douglas Sirk's 1950s melodrama *Written on the Wind* (1956). Boles, without Iris, Veronkha, or his memory at the film's conclusion, remains Maddin's most affecting hero precisely because, unlike Einar in *Gimli Hospital*, Boles hasn't even the memory of past love to comfort him. Will Straw writes of *Archangel* that though its sets are minimal, "it is endearing in part because it imagines itself an epic."<sup>17</sup> *Archangel* also has one of the most beautifully strange scenes in contemporary movies: the wave of white rabbits that flows over a wall, harbinger of the enemy's advance. It is this film that, as Straw writes, made clear Maddin's "cinematic allegiances" to "the lost codes of late-silent/early-sound cinema, not the dissident traditions of surrealism or an American underground."<sup>18</sup>

The genre picture *Mob Story* also appeared in 1990. It was written and directed by Gabriel and Jancarlo Markiw, independent filmmakers unaffiliated with the Film Group, and was their first and only film. In it, a weary mobster returns to his western Canadian roots to escape the bounty placed on his head by a rival gangster, and is reunited with his son. The film is set in Winnipeg and stars John Vernon as Luce, the prodigal gangster, and Al Waxman as his nemesis. Despite great hopes for the film, given its cast of well-known Canadian actors (Margot Kidder was the rival's moll), the film's casting was off-base and its attempts at comedy were awkward. It sank without much notice.

The following year, Film Group alumnus and one-time executive director, M.B. Duggan, who had been praised for his short *Mike* (1990), tried his hand at a fea-

ture. The result was *Smoked Lizard Lips* (1991), in which a northern Manitoba town facing hard times decides to improve upon its fortunes by offering itself as a refuge to a deposed third-world country dictator, whose favourite food gives the film its title. The dictator proves impervious to new surroundings, regarding his environment as another form of banana republic. There is a coup of sorts, and the dictator is again overthrown and stuffed at a local taxidermist shop. With a budget of one million dollars and a score by the Kronos Quartet, *Lizard Lips* tried unsuccessfully to imitate John Paizs in its mix of "50s kitsch comedies with Duggan's own brand of rapid cut editing, extreme camera angles, and mild political satire"<sup>19</sup> to little good effect.

*Careful* (1992), Guy Maddin's third feature, confirmed his status as "Canada's most archaically inventive, and eccentric, visual stylist."<sup>20</sup> The film was Maddin's first venture into colour, and he enlisted the help of Mike Marshall to shoot half of the film and solve the problem of making colour photography as mysterious in its effects as black and white. Maddin's exploration of desire's roundelay was here re-routed slightly into incest. In *Careful*, the German mountain film finds a new home on the prairie, setting the concept of Canadian "regional cinema" on its ear. Maddin's lovingly artificial re-animation of another country's regional genre also puts paid to earnest pronouncements on the necessarily organic relations between local filmmakers in any given place and their cinematic productions. In his essay on *Careful*, Will Straw notes that the unfamiliarity of most viewers and critics with the genre of the mountain film is part of the point: "Maddin's films are both inventive revisitings of genuine past styles and imagined versions of such styles."<sup>21</sup> Maddin's narrative mischief also, as Darrell Varga writes,

“disavows the instrumentalist and social-realist tendency in much of Canadian film.”<sup>22</sup> The residents of Tolzbad (a play on the name of Maddin’s long-time collaborator, George Toles<sup>23</sup>) a community constantly threatened by avalanche, lead lives of surface restraint, though their inner selves are riven with forbidden desires. Even as brothers Grigorss and Johann train at butler school, an institution of repressive propriety, Johann cannot contain his lust for his mother, which drives him to his death in remorse. Grigorss too dies in the end, but only after his mother has hanged herself, and an avalanche has carried away his love, Klara, and her incestuous father.

The positive response to Aaron Kim Johnston’s *The Last Winter* (1990) fed high expectations of his follow-up, 1993’s *For the Moment*, which was released to considerable fanfare, much of it occasioned by the presence of rising star Russell Crowe in his North American debut. Like *Winter*, the film is a period piece, set on the Canadian Commonwealth air-training base in Brandon during World War II. Crowe plays Lachlan, an Aussie trainee preparing for service in the air war who becomes romantically involved with a young married woman whose husband is already overseas. Though gamely acted by Crowe and cast, the film, described as a “poignant high-toned soap-opera,”<sup>24</sup> suffers from a clichéd script and precious camerawork. The colours are wonderful, and some of Ian Elkin’s images—of planes frolicking over wheat fields—should be breathtaking. But the shots are too self-consciously pretty to be powerfully dramatic, and the story becomes predictable in its handing out of seemingly cosmic punishment to the briefly straying wife. Though it received several favourable notices, the combination of its sentimental and predictable plot and its almost self-congratulatory visuals makes for an uninspired film.

Norma Bailey, the only local woman to direct a feature film for theatrical release in Manitoba during this period, made *Bordertown Café*, also shot by Elkin, in 1993. Bailey had earlier television credits and had co-directed another feature, *Martha, Ruth and Edie* (1988), with Deepa Mehta, but this was her first made-in-Manitoba venture. Based on a play by local playwright Kelly Rebar, *Bordertown* centres on family tensions arising primarily from the illusions of a single mother who daydreams of her wayward trucker ex-husband coming back across the border from the States to declare, finally, that he loves her after all. Like Johnston's *The Last Winter*, *Bordertown* is pure prairie naturalism, in which, as K. George Godwin writes, the director "seeks to find sources of character in the particulars of the small-town prairie landscape" in contrast to the interests of the Film Group regulars in the medium itself as a spur for artistic expression.<sup>25</sup> Marlene, the waitress and mother who, in her self-delusion, risks losing her son and her only reasonable chance for romantic contentment, is well-acted by Susan Hogan. Other characters, though, rarely step out of their appointed roles as foils long enough to demand emotional commitment from the viewer. As Godwin notes, the film also under-exploits its setting—a small town on the Canadian-American border—making the characters seem adrift, rather than torn, between two worlds.

In the following year, 1994, John Kozak's second film, *Hell Bent*, appeared. The film follows three teenagers, Marty, Andy and Leslie, as they wander around an unspecified city, engaging in more and more provocative and violent behaviour as they go. The teens themselves are opaque as characters: when we meet them the two boys are arguing, while Leslie walks sullenly along, smoking, her face expressionless. These dynamics are

sustained for the rest of the film, providing no glimpse of an inner life, or of a motive for the escalation of their aggression from vandalism to home invasion and murder other than Marty's free-floating rage. This impenetrability creates distance between the spectator and the characters; they become a horror show--creatures from Planet Sociopath. And yet as the film unspools its way to its horrific conclusion, the ease with which the teens make every social interaction a confrontation, and the fact that no one intervenes to stop them, makes the film riveting to watch. There is no real suspense, just a bit of curiosity over the final shape disaster will take, which is enough to make the images, and especially the affect-less face of Leslie, stay with a viewer after the scenes of trashing and torching are over. Though there is an inevitability to the shape of the narrative, and virtually no character development, Kozak's direction of his young actors elicits powerful, frightening performances from them.

Prairie post-modernism, the catchy phrase bestowed on what Gene Walz called the "house style"<sup>26</sup> of the Winnipeg Film Group bloomed again in Lorne Bailey's *The Green Peril* (1995), a surreal fantasy influenced by Paizs and Maddin, though lacking their control over the proliferation of wacky narrative elements. Maddin regular Kyle McCulloch stars as a hapless office worker whose wife is also his supervisor, and who demotes him at work. Affected by a mystically paranoid television show warning of the intentions of plant life to take over the world, and seriously over-dosing on coffee, he eventually ends up in the woods, lost, on his way to a company retreat. Encounters with the botanist figure from television (played by John Kozak) and hallucinations in which he talks to the decomposing corpse of his company's boss (dead in an air crash) form the story's climax. The effective

creepiness of the scenes with the talking corpse in the woods is undercut by the emphasis on the banal and crazy-making office environment, leaving the film with some good scenes, but no sense of either a narrative or a poetic goal.

The mid-1990s saw a falling off of feature productions in Manitoba, eclipsed in part by an increase in the amount of industry-based work, including television, available to the directors, producers and crew who had earned their stripes in the early years of CIDO. The Film group also entered a period of instability. Aaron Kim Johnston and Derek Mazur turned to television producing: Johnston's company brought out *The Arrow* (1997), while Mazur produced adaptations of *The Diviners* (1993) and *Nights Below Station Street* (1997), the latter directed by Norma Bailey, who directed other television adaptations and series during this period. An exception, as usual, was Guy Maddin, whose fourth feature, *Twilight of the Ice Nymphs* came out in 1997. *Twilight*, filmed by Mike Marshall, was a departure for Maddin in that the relatively large budget permitted filming in colour on 35mm as well as the casting of well-known actors such as Shelley Duvall, Frank Gorshin, and Pascale Bussières. The story of a released convict, Peter, who falls in love with Julia, a mysterious woman on the ship that brings him back to his family's ostrich farm turns on the triangulated desire prominent in other Maddin movies. Amelia, the protagonist's sister, is in love with Dr. Solti, the mesmerist Svengali figure who controls Juliana. Meanwhile, Dr. Solti's wife, the abandoned and pregnant Zephyr, becomes involved with Peter. Of all Maddin's features *Twilight* proved the most troublesome to its director, and it remains the least satisfying of his features, in part because Maddin's lack of control over everything from casting and

film stock to, finally, the lead actor's line readings, makes it clear how much Maddin's art depends on his artisanal, rather than merely auteurist, approach to movie-making.

In light of David Clanfield's declaration in *Canadian Film* (1987) that "A film shot on location with a strong sense of local colour does not constitute regional film-making ... true regional film-making is represented by the work of local companies and directors committed to making films that dwell upon a particular region's pictorial qualities, social problems, and dilemmas,"<sup>27</sup> none of Maddin's films, including *The Saddest Music in the World* (2003), set most obviously and hilariously in depression-era Winnipeg during a contest to establish the country with the most heart-wrenching musical soul, are regional films. Rather, as Straw writes, Maddin's films are examples of "the new baroque, an aesthetic favouring the ceremonial and the artificial over the referential."<sup>28</sup> While details of Maddin's life continue to find their way into his work—his father's career as a coach of the Winnipeg Maroons hockey team, and his mother's basement beauty salon in the recent *Cowards Bend the Knee* (2003), for example—all are transformed by his inspired anachronism, and his love for the depredations of time on images. The result is the most idiosyncratic, artistically significant, sustained cinematic achievement, in television, short, and feature-length form, in Manitoba or in Canada over the last twenty years.

Though Maddin's influence on the style of Manitoba film production is the most recognizable, he has not been the only local filmmaker to sire cinematic descendents. In 1998 Caelum Vatnsdal's black and white film *Black as Hell, Strong as Death, Sweet as Love* appeared, bearing traces of Greg Hanec's *Downtime* (1988) in its depiction of Sig, a young man about-the-Osborne-Village who divides his attentions between coffee cups and beer

kegs. Sig meets the alluring Catherine, who makes it clear she is interested in him, and to whom he seems attracted, but for some reason, he spends most of the film battling his ambivalence over anything but the most casual sexual connections, hooking up with her just before he commits to leaving the city for a six-month stint in a factory. There is more humour in the characters than in Hanec's film, and Sig, Catherine and the cast of lethargic city-dwellers are not nearly so isolated as Hanec's, although they inhabit a similar world of crummy jobs and old apartment blocks. The episodic structure of the film highlights the round of café-hopping, parties, hook-ups and break-ups among the group of friends whose shared ambition seems to be the evasion of ambition. It's an uneven but well-written talk-heavy film, at once more honest and more gentle in its rendering of self-centred urbanites than the tightly-scripted *Inertia* (2001).

*Hand*, the first feature by local Adam Rodin about three friends who come to the rescue of an ice cream parlour server who is being harassed by her boss, also appeared in 1998. The would-be saviours accidentally kill the boss, and end up fleeing from the vigilante rage of the victim's father, a cop. Paul Suderman's camerawork is the best thing about the film. Over-written, badly scored and poorly-acted, the film trades in hysterical masculinity and sophomoric humour. Rodin released his second self-produced film, *Scalpers*, two years later. *Scalpers* is a slick-looking work, again, a credit to Paul Suderman, the cinematographer, who had trained with Maddin on *Twilight of the Ice Nymphs*. The script borrows heavily from *Pulp Fiction* (1994) and *Seinfeld* in its effort to present the world of ticket scalping in Winnipeg as fun and sexy as well as dangerous, putting long and pointless speeches on inane



topics in the mouths of its poorly-directed actors, which only emphasizes the unoriginality of the writing.

In 1998 Manitoba Film and Sound replaced CIDO as the government corporation responsible for funding most film productions in Manitoba. Its transformation accompanied a resurgence in production in the early years of the new century that rivaled that of 1988-1990. As the Manitoba film scene rounded the corner into the new century, its productions became more accomplished. Whether conceived of in primarily realist, experimental, mainstream or anarchic terms, Manitoba features became more sure of themselves, their writers and directors more certain in their ability to channel their efforts with intention toward a creative goal. More of these recent releases have been receiving festival attention, not only in Toronto or Vancouver, but also at Sundance and in Venice. These are signs of a maturing local industry with professional, developed talent to match its vision.

*Heater*, produced, set, and shot in Winnipeg, appeared in 1999. Written and directed by Torontonian Terrence Odette, the story follows Ben (Gary Farmer) and an unnamed character (Stephen Ouimette) around the city on a winter day as both homeless men try to return a space heater to a store for the cash refund. *Heater's* Winnipeg is a hostile urban landscape, each familiar street and strip mall altered not by mannered style but by perspective alone. A simple trip to the store becomes a test of street survival skills as the two rivals/companions jostle, compete with, and assist each other in what comes to be something of an arctic expedition. Missing shoes, no car or bus fare, racist harassment by the police, and the small comfort of a cigarette loom as defining elements of this *Waiting for Godot*-like tale, which, for all of its accomplished acting, disappeared without much of a trace, not

unlike Denys Arcand's little-known *Joyeux calvaire* (1996), a film on an almost identical topic.

Sean Garrity's *Inertia* and Noam Gonick's *Hey, Happy!* were both released in 2001, providing a study in contrasting treatments of the city of Winnipeg. Both directors had done earlier work with the Film Group: Garrity was known for his experimental short works, while Gonick had made a splash with a gay revision of the Winnipeg General Strike in his short film *1919*, and had made *Waiting for Twilight*, a documentary about Guy Maddin, both in 1997. Garrity's *Inertia* was winner of the Best Canadian First Film prize at the 2001 Toronto International Film Festival. The film, shot by long-time Maddin cinematographer Mike Marshall, turns on the analogy, drawn visually as well as conceptually, between relationships and other systems of inter-locking and interdependent elements, such as the structure of the city, as well as the systems (water, for example) that enable the city-system to flourish. Just as love's system is breaking down, as evidenced by all four protagonists forming huge and inappropriate crushes on each other, so the faulty water works are infecting everyone in the city with a slight cough. Garrity loves Winnipeg (a *Toronto Sun* review admitted that the film made the city "look cool"<sup>29</sup>) and uses repeated shots of busy (and recognizable) intersections to make his point about the stop-and-go of desire. Garrity's filmic analogy stalls however, precisely because lust and love are not systematic; desire jumps the tracks and can't be directed through any of the circuits the film has to offer. The film is rather obvious in its juxtapositions of city traffic shots and images from computers and biology, but the characters' scenes were often developed through improvisation, which gives the best of their exchanges an easy rhythm and an unforced humour, as when Laura,

who is ditching Joseph, says to him that a break-up “doesn’t just happen. We have to work at it.”

*Hey, Happy!*, Noam Gonick’s debut feature, is a paean to all things synthetic-- from transsexual prostitutes and chemical waste compounds to music—that pictures Winnipeg as the site of the rave at the end of the world. The floodwaters are rising, and the city is headed for the drink, but before all is swept away, the film’s hero, a sexy DJ named Sabu, wants to complete his life’s mission of having sex with 2000 men. His target is Happy, a sweet-faced paranoid in overalls who hears aliens on his radio and is constantly ingesting industrial waste. Sabu’s sexual rival is Spanky, a scream-queen hairstylist (the reference to Lill’s beauty shop seems a nod to Maddin) with a plump female posse, who at one point kidnaps Happy. The film is a delirium of dance music, sumptuous Cinema-scope compositions by Paul Suderman, and campy over-acting. It’s clear that Gonick is channelling Bruce La Bruce, as well as John Waters and Russ Meyer, though, with the exception of the implied (and lyrical) blow-job that completes Sabu’s quest for sexual transcendence, and a scene of naked men draped languidly over chairs and sofas as Sabu walks down an alley, the film is erotically restrained. There is a bizarre scene of disembowelment (from which the character arises, unscathed) and a rape. The plot is unreal and incredible, the characters, from another world, but the film as a whole is a riot, especially of colour. Suderman’s compositions, which emphasize the industrial periphery of the city (there are no shots of a downtown; it seems already to have disappeared under the water), make the open-air porn shop on Garbage Hill (itself an artificial terrain fashioned from a landfill), the train tracks, waste silos, transmission lines and dump trucks eerily, mysteriously, beautiful. The visuals are

much more thoughtful than the writing, but the film is fearless in its freakiness, leading Robert Enright to speculate that it “may be the most subversive film ever made by a Canadian in the all-too-brief history of our national cinema.”<sup>30</sup>

Jeff Erbach, known for *Soft Like Me* (1996) and *Under Chad Valley* (1998), disturbing and visually arresting short films about pedophilic farmers, child slaves, and butchers, brought his first feature, *The Nature of Nicholas*, to the screen in 2002. The term “prairie gothic” had attached itself to Erbach’s work by this time, and in *Nicholas* the same elements are firmly in place, though secured by a quiet, ironic humour. The film is set in a small, unnamed prairie town in which Nicholas lives with his widowed mother, a woman who appears in each scene of the film dressed in identically styled, but differently coloured dresses, the same pin on the same shoulder of each one. Though Nicholas and his best friend, Bobby, are caught up in a swirl of sexual awareness comprised of parties, girls, and games of spin the bottle, Erbach’s portrait of rural life takes a dark turn in the aftermath of an impulsive kiss bestowed by Nicholas on Bobby. The kiss generates a Bobby “double,” and the “kissed” Bobby shows up on Nicholas’ doorstep in the early stages of bodily decomposition, seeking shelter. Nicholas leads the decaying Bobby up to his room, hiding the corpse-like thing under his bed and caring for it as an act of responsibility to his friend. Nicholas’ life is further complicated by the appearance of his dead father as a scissor-wielding apparition capable of inserting his hands into the backs of other adults and children, soundlessly dictating their words and manipulating their actions.

Read in part as an allegory of queer abjection, *The Nature of Nicholas* offers the decaying double of Bobby,

and, later, of Nicholas himself, as embodiments of forbidden desire. The ghostly father, who directs Nicholas toward heteronormativity, contributes to what Andrew Lesk calls the film's "slide to horror" by incarnating parental prohibitions against same-sex desire that remain coercive even while those who might promote them are beyond the grave.<sup>31</sup> This emphasis on the father's bloody interventions has a clumsy literalness that sits uneasily with the film's resonant, nightmarish realism, its visual rendering of fields and farmscapes in deliberately over-lit shots that make Nicholas' rural surroundings paradoxical: as Lesk notes, he walks "among expansive prairie fields that lack depth and breadth."<sup>32</sup> The deadpan humour of the film, as well as its suggestion that queer adolescents on the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century prairie resemble the living dead, become overshadowed by the horror-movie antics of the returning father, which hang lead weights on the film's metaphors and drag them to the ground. *The Nature of Nicholas* plays neatly, though, as a queer version of *The Last Winter* (1990). In that film Will, like Nicholas, prepares for a move to the city, and also has a crush on an inappropriate other. Will, in *Winter*, is in love with his young cousin, but since his puppy-love has a straight orientation, no zombie-selves emerge. Will's family is also a model of support and understanding, rather than of repression, and rural Manitoba in the 1960s is lyrically magical, rather than charged with creepy menace.

Jon Einarsson Gustafsson, born and educated in Iceland, trained in the US before emigrating to Manitoba in 1997. Four years after directing a documentary called *The Importance of Being Icelandic*, Gustafsson released a feature, *Kanadiana*, in 2002. *Kanadiana* is a moody heist flick in which two thieves rob a Winnipeg diamond courier, and then, to avoid detection by the police, plant

the stolen goods in a bag in the back of a pickup truck driven by a would-be writer who is innocently heading north to a friend's house to overcome her writer's block. The film begins well, with the thieves (Spinner, the wound-up psycho, and Pretty Boy, recently released from prison) given some substance, though Pretty Boy's involvement in the crime so soon after his release strains credulity. As Kristen, the writer, and the two thieves head north to what looks like Gimli in their respective cars, Einarsson focuses on long stretches of straight highway bracketed by low, frozen fields and the big, cold, prairie sky. The visual emphasis is on the landscape as fate, the shots and isolated settings reminiscent of those in the Coen brothers' *Fargo* (1996). Spinner and Pretty Boy track down the writer, and must somehow get the diamonds back. Pretty Boy, sent into the house to do the job, works his way into an intense relationship with Kristen. Their interaction solves her creative block, providing a less than convincing thriller ending, with an equally implausible coda after the concluding title sequence.

*East of Euclid*, a mock film noir directed by Jeff Solylo, Guy Maddin's art director on *Careful* (1992), appeared in 2003. Set in Winnipeg's north end, a location suggested by carefully faked miniature streets and warehouses, *Euclid* revels in every stereotype about the city's Eastern European connections, its beloved Winnipeg Jets hockey team, and the weather. The story is narrated by a gossip columnist for the Winnipeg Tribune (the name of a real former left-wing city paper), Natalia, who is in love with the paper's star photographer, Valeri Petrov. She tells the story of Villosch, an inveterate gambler attended by a silent, long-suffering wife (who puts dollar bills through an old wringer washer), but lustfully drawn to Alexandria, a worker in his perogy factory. Villosch, in hid-

ing from the KGB for years because of embezzlement, longs to retire to Atlantic City and gamble against the best in the world. His plan is to kidnap a visiting Finnish hockey player and use the ransom money to finance his escape. The film re-works elements of *Bob le Flambeur* (1953) in comic terms, and is littered with references to famous directors like Welles, Eisenstein, and Kaurismaki. Solylo's previous experience with Maddin shows not only in his set designs, which are beautiful, but also in the mannered effects created by the use of post-synched sound. There are traces of Maddin too in Valeri's prosthetic eye-camera. Paul Suderman once again provides stunning camera work. The dialogue is peppered with corny jokes about garlic sausages as murder weapons and songs by the Guess Who, while the plot has intentionally awkward twists that don't always make the turn, particularly in the wake of the kidnapping, when the action slows to the speed of the lugubrious score.

The legendary chill of Winnipeg is featured again in *The Saddest Music in the World*, Guy Maddin's 2003 release (which made its debut at Sundance) in which the set depicts ramshackle buildings in beautifully glittering snow, an image suited to the oxymoron of the plot: a lucrative contest in Depression-ridden Winnipeg to find the saddest music in the entire world. The sponsor of the contest is Lady Port-Huntly, a beer baroness who wears a tiara on her crooked blonde wig, and who sports a pair of glass legs filled with beer to replace the ones she lost in a bit of botched roadside surgery after a car accident years before. Port-Huntly is again, like so many of Maddin's women, the apex of a love triangle between two related men, the caddish entrepreneur Chester Kent and his father. Returning to Winnipeg after many years as a Broadway promoter, Chester recruits, one by one, the

losing teams in this contest of morose musicians in order to strengthen the US bid to win the prize. Chester's antagonist is his brother Roderick, who performs under the name Gavril the Great, a reference to the assassin responsible for starting the First World War. Roderick's estranged and nymphomaniac wife, Narcissa, is another of Maddin's amnesiacs; she remembers nothing of their young son's illness and death, and now carries on an affair with Chester.

Maddin's signature rendering of this material nevertheless maintains a clear narrative focus, a departure from his wilder experiments with plot and character. Working with his biggest budget yet, and with established stars like Isabella Rossellini, Maria de Medeiros and Mark McKinney, *Music* is Maddin's craftiest feature, its grainy, hand-tinted visuals and knowing treatment of melodrama held in check by an almost conventional story shape. Feeling far less irritatingly whimsical than *Twilight* (1997), and with truly inspired musical numbers (such as Narcissa's rendition of "The Song is You"), *Music* also lets down its emotional guard at times, something Maddin's films do not often do. Maddin's attraction to melodrama's excess licenses visual and stylistic extravagance, but the characters' emotional conditions often feel performed before, rather than communicated to, the spectator. Because of his allegiance to form, the distress and heartbreak of Maddin's characters are expressed in a charmingly dated gestural language to which it is difficult to attach strong viewer emotion, though it is enormously entertaining to watch. This is what Steven Shaviro suggests in writing of Maddin that "he wants us to take the emotional predicaments of his characters seriously, even though he makes it impossible for us to do so."<sup>33</sup> In *Music*, it is finally possible to take Roderick and Narcissa seriously because, in the



end, memory returns, bringing with it, the realization of shared loss.

Manitoba enjoyed a second Sundance showing in 2004, with the release of Gary Yate's first feature *Seven Times Lucky*, a noirish caper flick in the tangled-plot mode of *Nine Queens* (2000). The film pairs two well-known actors, Kevin Pollack and Liane Balaban, in the roles of run-down hustler Harlan and his young apprentice-lover Fiona. Yate's setting isn't Winnipeg specific, and the mixture of the dated (Harlan's rumpled attire) and the contemporary (cell phones) in the mise-en-scene seems intended to make the film timeless. But given the known territory of the desperate grifter genre, and the director's apparent determination to avoid giveaway shots that would identify the location of the action, the switchbacks of the plot end up taking place in what feels like a meta-physically confined space. Things feel claustrophobic and, at the same time, weightless, since the film isn't grounded in any specific era or place. Though we understand from the first scene of the film that the stakes are supposed to be high, since we've just watched Harlan blow away ten grand that he owes to his crime boss on a horse, it is hard to concentrate on the many plot convolutions without also noticing, to the film's detriment, the era-clash between Harlan's hat and car and the bank machines he and Fiona rob. The plot is driven by Harlan's need to pay back what he has lost, and in the course of the many inevitable betrayals and set-ups that follow, he emerges as both hopefully in love with Fiona, and hopeless in his scheming. Pollak's performance as Harlan becomes a little too precious just as the plot complications multiply into pointlessness. In trying so hard to make this Winnipeg film

generic in an interesting way, Yates makes it fatally indistinguishable from any other.

The migration of people from open prairie spaces to dense urban environments takes figurative as well as literal form in the opening sequence of Noam Gonick's second feature *Stryker*, released in 2004. Taking its name from the term for a probationary gang recruit, *Stryker* opens on the Brokenhead native reserve. We see a young aboriginal boy, known for the rest of the film as Stryker, strike a match and set an abandoned church ablaze, rousting a group of sniffers. Walking away from the building, Stryker passes carefully through a group of buffalo (their small numbers as accusatively suggestive of the legacy of contact as is the derelict church) and hitches a ride on a freight train that takes him to Winnipeg. The rest of the film tracks a turf war between two gangs, the Indian Posse and the Asian Bomb Squad, by placing Stryker at the edges of the action. Virtually silent throughout the film (which is exquisitely shot by Ed Lachman, of *The Virgin Suicides* (1999) and *Far From Heaven* (2002) fame), Stryker is less a fully realized figure than a symbol of dispossessed aboriginal youth, lobbed back and forth as he is between Mama Ceece and Omar, the leaders of the rival gangs. The film's action is set and filmed in Winnipeg's famed North End, filmed as "a dessicated exurbia in a state of perpetual siege" and given visual treatment that emphasizes the ambivalent character of the area.<sup>34</sup> On the one hand is the evidence, in boarded-up shops and buildings, of an almost evacuated city core. On the other is the energy of the people who still live there, indicated in splashes of red or orange colour that appear in every shot, from the lining of a parka to a thong hanging on a mid-winter clothesline, and that are reminiscent too of Stryker's penchant for arson, a kind of avenging passion.

Though it is a realist film with a political agenda, *Stryker* is relieved of its potentially deadly seriousness by acerbic wit and, as one reviewer wrote, by “how easily Gonick’s didactic intentions succumb to the pleasure principle,” providing lingering shots of showering gang-bangers.<sup>35</sup>

While Gonick is obviously committed to capturing the complexity of Winnipeg’s gang culture, and to creating a film that will signify truths about racism, urban violence and resilience on more than just a literal level, his writing and direction is not as firm as his vision is ambitious. Awarding a leadership role in the Indian Posse to a woman rather than to a man, for example is a gesture of filmic equity not rooted in the realities of gang life that he is in other areas so attuned to. It also strains credulity that both gangs would spend so much time cavorting with tranny prostitutes. But there is a certain awkward pleasure in seeing Winnipeg’s own mean streets being given the big city treatment. Performances by a multitude of first-time actors are also uneven, though Ryan Black as Omar and Joseph Mesiano as Daisy Chain are the most impressive, as is the opening credit sequence, and the film’s score. *Stryker* was selected by the Metropolitan Museum of Art for its Canadian Front: New Films 2005 cinema showcase.

*Stryker*’s release marks the twenty-year anniversary of Telefilm Canada. Since the mid-1980s Manitoba’s feature films have become more accomplished, and the complement of talented writers, producers and actors more numerous. As in the rest of Canada though, local audiences for Manitoba films still tend to wait for confirmation from others outside the province that a given film is worth a look before committing themselves to a theatre seat. The difference in Manitoba though is the artistic success of its independent cinema in a mid-conti-

mental space relatively free from the potentially inhibiting effects of substantial budgets and commercial pressures on the creativity of writers and directors. Nurtured by the enduring idiosyncrasies of the Winnipeg Film Group, Manitoba feature film is the middle child of Canadian cinema. No longer nascent, but knowing and canny, it flourishes on the frontiers of the middle distance.

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> George Melnyk, *100 Years of Canadian Cinema*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004.

<sup>2</sup> See Ted Madger, *Canada's Hollywood: The Canadian State and Feature Films*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993 and Christopher Gittings, *Canadian National Cinema*, London and New York: Routledge, 2002.

<sup>3</sup> Gittings, 99.

<sup>4</sup> Robert Enright, "Getting Happy before the apocalypse: Winnipeg filmmaker Noam Gonick casts a decidedly camp light on his hometown just before it sinks beneath the flood," *Globe and Mail*, May 24, 2001.

<sup>5</sup> See Kieran Keohone, "Symptoms of Canada: National Identity and the Theft of Enjoyment," *CinéAction* 28 (Spring 1992): 20-33, and Geoff Pevere, "Greenland Revisited: The Winnipeg Film Group During the 1980s," *Dislocations*, Winnipeg Film Group Exhibition Catalogue, (Winnipeg: City Press, 1995), 37-51, and Pevere, "Guy Maddin: True to Form," *Take One* 1.1 (New Series, Fall 1992): 4-11.

<sup>6</sup> Gilles Hébert, "Dislocations," *Dislocations*, Winnipeg Film Group Exhibition Catalogue, (Winnipeg: City Press, 1995), 8-9.

<sup>7</sup> Pevere, "Greenland Revisited," 42.

<sup>8</sup> Pevere, "Greenland Revisited," 42.

<sup>9</sup> Pevere, "Greenland Revisited," 42; K. George Godwin, "Far From the Maddin Crowd: Thirty Years of the Winnipeg Film Group," *Cinema Scope*, 20 (Fall 2004): 15.

<sup>10</sup> K. George Godwin, "The Good, The Bad, and the Gory: Film-Making in Manitoba," *Border Crossings*, 8. 12 (March 1989): 7; Patrick Lowe, "The Winnipeg Film Group Aesthetic: A View From Within," *Dislocations*, 68.

<sup>11</sup> Peter Rist, *Guide to the Cinemas of Canada*, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2001.

<sup>12</sup> Gene Walz, Review of *Dislocations*, *Canadian Journal of Film Studies*, 5.2 (Fall 1996), 141.

<sup>13</sup> Lowe, 70.

<sup>14</sup> Lowe, 70.

<sup>15</sup> Godwin, "The Good, the Bad, and the Gory," 7

<sup>16</sup> See Lowe and Walz for similar observations.

<sup>17</sup> Will Straw. "Reinhabiting Lost Languages: Guy Maddin's *Careful*," *Canada's Greatest Features*, Gene Walz, ed. (Amsterdam: Rodopi Press, 2002), 306

<sup>18</sup> Straw, 306-307.

<sup>19</sup> Lowe, 70.

<sup>20</sup> Rist, 30.

<sup>21</sup> Straw, 310.

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- <sup>22</sup> Darrell Varga, "Desire in Bondage: Guy Maddin's *Careful*," *Canadian Journal of Film Studies* 8.2 (Fall 1999): 59.
- <sup>23</sup> Straw, 310.
- <sup>24</sup> Stephen Holden, "For the Moment," *The New York Times*, April 19, 1996.
- <sup>25</sup> K. George Godwin, "Bordertown Vogue," *Border Crossings*, 10.13 (July 1991): 37.
- <sup>26</sup> Walz, 140.
- <sup>27</sup> David Clanfield, *Canadian Film* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1987), 105.
- <sup>28</sup> Straw, 308.
- <sup>29</sup> Liz Braun, "Inertia has right moves," *Toronto Sun*, Friday, January 25, 2002.
- <sup>30</sup> Robert Enright, "Popeye Gonick and the Filmy Spinach of Sex," *Border Crossings*, 20.11 (February 2001), 46.
- <sup>31</sup> Andrew Lesk, "Caress, Denial, Decay: Queer Desire in *The Nature of Nicholas*," *CineAction*, 65 (2004): 25-28.
- <sup>32</sup> Lesk, 25.
- <sup>33</sup> Steven Shaviro, "Fire and Ice: The Films of Guy Maddin," *North of Everything*, ed. Bill Beard and Jerry White, Edmonton: The University of Alberta Press, 2002: 216-221.
- <sup>34</sup> Ioannis Mookas, "Avenging Fires: Canadian director looks at ethnic strife among Winnipeg's indigenous peoples," *Gay City News*, 4.2, March 17-23, 2005.
- <sup>35</sup> Mookas.

## CHAPTER 9

### **The Centre Cannot Hold: The Cinema of Atlantic Canada**

**Tom McSorley**  
**Canadian Film Institute**

#### **I. AWAY**

The movies came in overnight by train, down from the great city of Montreal, on the *Nova Scotian*, plowing snow in front of it all the dark winter....

David Adams Richards<sup>1</sup>

In Atlantic Canada, the movies always came from somewhere else. This was the case in Richards' novel, set in small town New Brunswick in the early 1930s, and the situation remains largely the same seventy-five years later. It is, therefore, ironic that the first Canadian dramatic feature film was actually produced in Atlantic Canada. Made in 1913 by the Canadian Bioscope Company in the city of Halifax and on location in Nova Scotia's Annapolis Valley, *Evangeline* was a commercial success in Canada and the United States but has since vanished completely, except for a few fragments of individual images. This un-

fortunate absence reflects the history and development of Canadian cinema generally; specifically, *Evangeline's* disappearance can also be heard to echo ironically in the Atlantic provinces, as feature film production in this part of Canada has been, until recently, virtually nonexistent.

In another sense, perhaps the absence of *Evangeline* is also appropriate. Although made in Nova Scotia, it was directed by and starred Americans and was an adaptation of a poem by American poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. In other words, it is not a film made by Atlantic Canadians, but rather a romantic narrative set in the region's natural settings and produced by outsiders. From elsewhere. This approach to film production, which uses Atlantic Canada as a colourful, delightfully backward, and picturesque backdrop, persists today and is present in other forms of cultural production.<sup>2</sup> Although such work temporarily infuses local production communities with money and technical experience, it has little to do with Atlantic Canada telling its own stories cinematically. The fugitive birth of Canadian feature filmmaking in Atlantic Canada can be regarded, then, as a curiously appropriate historical irony, for the development of an authentic, indigenous Atlantic Canadian cinema would not take place until well into the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

While certainly lamentable, such a prolonged absence is not surprising. It is difficult to envisage a film industry sustaining itself at any time in Atlantic Canada, given its small population, marginal political status, and its dependency upon and exploitation by outside interests, public and private. Economic arguments notwithstanding, the principal cause of this cinematic absence lies in Canada's historically colonial attitude towards its own cinema. If the birth of an indigenous cinema from Atlantic Canada was delayed by a Canadian cultural inferiority complex



and its consequent cinematic deference to Hollywood, it is ultimately made *possible*, however, by two other archetypal and interrelated aspects of Canada's cultural *zeitgeist*: regionalism and public funding of the arts. Emerging out of the optimism and relative prosperity of the 1960s, the philosophy of supporting artistic expression in all regions of Canada with national cultural institutions enabled artists, writers, and filmmakers to live and work outside the mainstream cultural 'centres' of Canada.

In the early 1970s, for example, the National Film Board set up regional offices in Atlantic Canada and The Canada Council also began to support independent film co-operatives being established there. This institutional combination, along with the energy and imagination of local filmmakers, helped establish a production infrastructure necessary to create an indigenous Atlantic Canadian cinema. The combination of resources contributed greatly to the number and quality of films being made in Atlantic Canada. Although most of the work produced at the co-operatives consists of short drama, documentary, and the occasional animated film, the co-operative approach meant films were made independently, with a high degree of artistic freedom and with minimal financial means and risk.

It is out of this non-industrial, fiercely independent film practice that a distinctive, identifiable cinema of Atlantic Canada emerges in the late 1970s and early 1980s. As if in response to Atlantic filmmakers' long frustrated desire to express themselves, the protracted cinematic absence is replaced with considerable speed by sophisticated, formally assured, and provocative images of a region which, in all senses of the word, produced them. The thematic and aesthetic implications of this new Atlantic Canadian cinema are also revealed in independent, artist-

driven work which, while exploring the tensions and drama of this part of Canada, challenges established Canadian notions of realism, representation, and, indeed, regionalism itself. In addition to an inevitably brief survey of feature filmmaking in Atlantic Canada [the rich and variegated practices of short films, animation, and documentary are not discussed here], this chapter will examine, with special attention given to William D. MacGillivray's key fiction films, how various filmmakers, to borrow Noreen Golfman's useful phrase, 're-imagine region.'<sup>3</sup> Contesting, as other Atlantic Canadian filmmakers do, the stereotypical representations and constructions of Atlantic Canada as a folksy backwater, MacGillivray's work offers the most sustained and complex cinematic expression of the region, as well as a simultaneous interrogation of the very concept of region itself within various Canadian cultural discourses.

## II. GETTING HERE

Filmmaking in Newfoundland, as in the three other Atlantic provinces, is a relatively recent phenomenon. This is not to suggest that no filmmaking activity whatsoever took place on the island. In 1931, an American-based company made *The Viking*, an impressive dramatic feature about the seal hunt in pre-Confederation Newfoundland. The development of an indigenous filmmaking community in Newfoundland would, however, take many more decades. In the 1960s, a combination of the National Film Board's 1967 "Challenge For Change", programme and Memorial University's development of a small film production unit helped create a modest infrastructure for filmmaking. In 1975, with the founding of the Newfoundland Independent Filmmakers Co-operative (NIFCO), lo-

cal filmmakers began to produce an impressive and idiosyncratic collection of short films. Drawing upon the considerable talents of the province's active theatre community these short films contain distinctive combinations of verbal wit, anti-clerical satire, social commentary, and self-conscious parody of cinematic forms. These combinations would also find their place in Newfoundland's feature films.

Until NIFCO began to help produce feature films like *The Adventure of Faustus Bidgood* (1986) and *Secret Nation* (1992), the cinematic incarnation of Newfoundland was to be found in Peter Carter's *The Rowdyman* (1972). Starring and written by native Newfoundlander Gordon Pinsent, the film focuses on the picaresque antics of Will Cole, a small-town buffoon with a sharp wit, insatiable sexual appetite, and a dead-end job at the local paper mill. His irresponsible behaviour with his best friend and favourite girl soon leads to tragic circumstances. While *The Rowdyman's* innocent invocation of the devil-may-care Newfoundlander presents a benign if unfortunate reality in that province, this early effort can best be described as a genteel distant relation to the ferocious Newfoundland independent cinema which emerges a decade or so later.

Ken Pittman's *No Apologies* (1990), as an example, offers a sobering assessment of the state of things in contemporary Newfoundland. Set in the company town of White Falls, it concerns the return of documentary filmmaker to his home town after learning of his father's imminent death. As the family gathers to wait for its patriarch to die, the personal anguish and frustration mounts for each of the surviving members. An unrelenting attack on the failure of the Canadian confederation, *No Apologies* not only demolishes the Will Cole stereotype, regarded here as a dangerously apolitical anachronism, but also the

myth of the impoverished yet happy Newfoundland. Aside from its astute political reading of the situation, implicating opportunistic provincial politicians in the destruction of the province, Pittman's film also explores the personal costs of either remaining in Newfoundland or leaving it.

If the fatalism and earnest anger of Pittman's vision of contemporary Newfoundland (also evident in his other films, 1988's *Finding Mary March* and 1999's *Misery Harbour*), delivered in a well-wrought realist cinematic style, demonstrates one dimension of the new cinema of Newfoundland, then *The Adventure of Faustus Bidgood*, Michael and Andy Jones' carnivalesque re-imagining of the Faust myth, represents quite another. Ten years in the making and arguably the real beginning of authentic Newfoundland moviemaking, *Bidgood*, released in 1986, focuses on Faustus Bidgood, a meek, lonely, and mentally unstable government clerk working at the Newfoundland Department of Education. From behind his desk, Faustus dreams of becoming the first President of the People's Republic of Newfoundland, marrying the pretty secretary who ignores him, ascending through the ranks of the bureaucracy, and avoiding a return to the mental hospital. In his equally hallucinatory 'real world', Faustus' maniacal superior includes him in a scheme to destroy a rival Newfoundland government cabinet minister. In addition to these rich and interconnected narrative strands, the film also takes us on Bunuelian journeys through Faustus' memories of his terrifying Catholic education, his mother's death, and the cinematic recreations of his imaginary life as President.

This dense interweaving of fantasy and reality is rendered in a baroque visual style and narrative structure. Directors Jones incorporate black and white cinema-vérité

documentary aesthetics, slow motion fantasy sequences, surrealist flashbacks, and even animation into the labyrinths of Faustus' real and imagined worlds. Beneath its carnival of images, parody, and skewed psychology, the film explores ideas of identity, memory, and the rather gothic dangers of closed systems of thought. It also poses questions about accepted 'realist' conventions of Canadian documentary and fiction filmmaking traditions. Beyond these themes, the film's absurdist glimmers of Newfoundland nationalism register an abiding political anger that may not remain in the realm of the fictional forever.

This theme is pursued in Michael Jones' subsequent feature, *Secret Nation* (1992), a conspiracy film about the referendum by which Newfoundland 'joined' Confederation. McGill Ph.d candidate, Freida Vokey (Cathy Jones), returns home to St. John's to do her final bits of research for her dissertation on the referendum which saw Newfoundland join Canada. She discovers her father may have had a crucial role in the process. Confronting established ideas of history, collective and individual memory, and political power in relation to Newfoundland's entry into Canada in 1949, *Secret Nation* is a drama which suggests that what we think we know about Canadian history may be very tenuous indeed. More recently, John Doyle's *Extraordinary Visitor* (1998) ponders the implications of a visit by Saint John the Baptist to contemporary Newfoundland. It is a Newfoundland now dominated by global capitalism, the Vatican, CNN, and rather soulless unbridled materialism. What Saint John finds is a place of anger, urban alienation, and media saturation. Like *Bidgood* and, to a degree, *No Apologies*, both these films examine how this province is perceived by others and how it perceives itself, whether in historical and political terms, as in *Secret Nation*, or in religious and cultural terms, as in *Extraordinary*

*Visitor*. More recent works, such as the digital feature by Barry Newhook and Lois Brown, *Bingo Robbers* (2001) and Anita McGee's *The Bread Maker* (2003), also detonate Newfoundland stereotypes as they explore contemporary life in an idiosyncratic, often misunderstood and misrepresented place.

In New Brunswick, a province more firmly rooted in the Canadian confederation but nevertheless marginalized by its modest size, feature film production has proven as fleeting as *Evangeline*. Like Nova Scotia, Newfoundland, and to a lesser extent, Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick's film culture also emerged out of the tenuous yet tenacious combination of the National Film Board's policy of regionalization in the 1970s and the founding of independent film co-operatives. Again, the filmmaking infrastructure is small and precarious, and the productions are almost exclusively short drama and documentary. In 1987, however, Jon Pedersen, whose previous work includes award-winning short documentaries for the National Film Board, co-wrote, produced and directed an psychologically complex feature-drama entitled *Tuesday Wednesday*, based on a script by David Adams Richards. Shot in Fredericton, New Brunswick's capital city, *Tuesday Wednesday* is an intense drama about an ex-schoolteacher and reformed alcoholic named Phillip who searches for and tries to reconcile with the mother of a boy he killed while driving drunk. With its austere, evocative style and spare, suggestive dialogue, Pedersen's often harrowing character study probes the psychology of guilt, forgiveness, and responsibility.

As the first feature film to be produced in New Brunswick in over 60 years, *Tuesday Wednesday* is a remarkably mature and confident work which studiously ignores enshrined Canadian codes of regionalism. About a

decade later, Bathurst filmmaker Tony Larder's *Unspoken* (1996), a triptych about teenaged angst, also makes no issue of its place of origin, arguing that what happens in a northern New Brunswick town is, at some level, no different than what happens anywhere else in North America. Indicative of these filmmakers' reluctance to enter 'regional' discourses based on preconceptions of their part of Canada, these works of course also indicate just how pervasive are the homogenizing cultural influences of the 'centre.' The propulsive works of Acadian New Brunswick filmmaker Rodrigue Jean, *Full Blast* (1999) and *Yellowknife* (2002) explore narratives of restlessness arising from the recognition, rightly or wrongly, of one's marginality in Canada, in North America, in the world.

Beyond the failed Canadian Bioscope Company in Halifax in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, filmmaking in Nova Scotia was limited to a few sporadic location shoots in 1920s and 1930s, and some folkloric/ethnographic documentary films by Margaret Perry and others. The development of a truly indigenous film culture in Nova Scotia is intimately bound up with those who founded the Atlantic Filmmakers Co-operative (AFCOOP) in Halifax in 1973. In addition to the regionalization initiatives undertaken by the NFB and the film and video activities to be found within the walls of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, the establishment of AFCOOP encouraged the development of an artist-driven, auteurist independent filmmaking model. Since the late 1980s, however, producers and public funding agencies both provincial and federal have encouraged more commercial production. With the brother producer-director team of Michael and Paul Donovan, the establishment of Slater Street Films (now defunct) not only jump-started a commercial film and television sector in Nova Scotia, it also led to the

active solicitation, through the construction of sound stages and an attractive tax environment, of off-shore film productions from Hollywood and Europe. The culmination of this commercialized approach is the arrival in 2006 of the Ivan Reitman-produced feature film directed by Mike Clattenburg based on his immensely popular television series, *Trailer Park Boys*. For over a decade, this commercial trend has made artist-driven independent film production even more daunting in Nova Scotia, although there have been several notable features produced, including Thom Fitzgerald's *The Movie of the Week* (1990) and *The Hanging Garden* (1997), as well as Andrea Dorfman's *Parsley Days* (2000) and *Love That Boy* (2003). Although Nova Scotia's independent film community still produces many diverse forms of short films, including documentary and animation, the province's recent film industry boom has further marginalized, if such a thing were possible, the more personal independent feature films such as those pioneered by William D. MacGillivray in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

Both in terms of their mode of production and their thematic and stylistic preoccupations, the films of William D. MacGillivray are exemplary. They challenge the stereotypical understanding of the place in which they are made by redefining and recalibrating its representation. They also refuse the commercial logic and industrial models of production, regarding them as products of an imported, largely American approach to filmmaking unsuited to the Atlantic Canadian context and, therefore, ultimately unsustainable. If there can be said to be a compelling cinematic presence in modern, complex Atlantic Canada, much of it resides in the searching, sophisticated work of William D. MacGillivray.



### III. ATLANTIC CENTRAL TIME: WILLIAM D. MACGILLIVRAY

The selection of a point of view is the initial action of culture.

Jose Ortega y Gasset<sup>4</sup>

Many things are changing in the world; many others are surviving. *Don Quixote* tells us just this: this is why he is so modern, but also so ancient, eternal. He illustrates the rupture of a world based on analogy and thrust into differentiation. He makes evident a challenge that we consider peculiarly ours: how to accept the diversity and mutation of the world, while retaining the mind's power for analogy and unity, so that this changing world shall not become meaningless.

Carlos Fuentes<sup>5</sup>

Culture is concerned with the capacity of the individual to appraise problems in terms of space and time and with enabling him to take the proper steps at the proper time. It is at this point that the tragedy of modern culture has arisen as inventions in commercialism have destroyed a sense of time.

Harold Innis<sup>6</sup>

The struggle for meaning in a world that is changing is the essential thematic core of MacGillivray's cinema and a central idea in Atlantic Canadian cultural expression generally. His characters are indeed 'thrust into differentiation' and respond by searching for 'analogy and unity,' for a creatively constructed and responsive 'point of view.' There is a conscious and concerted effort by these characters, with varying degrees of success, to use

the 'mind's power' to navigate its profound alienation in a rapidly changing, utterly commercialized and dangerously atemporal society. In this sense, MacGillivray's fictional universe bears remarkable similarities to Cervantes,' as both suggest through their protagonists' journeys that a modern response to the flux of life occurs in the recognition of the spaces between change and stability. Put more in Harold Innis' terms, the modern is an instance of balance between time and space executed by individual agency and conscious response within a recognized context.

Given the lack of a firmly rooted feature fiction filmmaking tradition in Atlantic Canada, the choice to privilege the act of imaginary invention over the 'empirical' recording of actuality, as in the more established Canadian documentary filmmaking tradition, is itself significant. It is in these gestures of cinematic imagination, long dominated by an industry whose interests lie elsewhere, that MacGillivray also confronts established constructions of time, space, and the modern, re-imagining and re-locating them within the discourses of Canadian culture generally and Canadian film culture specifically.

With his first work, *Aerial View* (1979), a drama about a young architect disillusioned with materialist culture, MacGillivray adumbrates his preoccupation with identity and alienation. This film also quietly announces that films from Atlantic Canada need not concern themselves exclusively with so-called Atlantic themes. Though clearly placed in Atlantic Canada, within the dramatic content and the temporally fragmented narrative structure of the film is articulated an argument about where the modern world is seen to exist and what are its characteristic features.

A successful urban architect, Geoff has become dissatisfied with the direction of his profession and decides to quit the firm because he is more interested in designing and building local housing, as he says, "using local materials and local skills." While this estranges him from his business partner, his wife, and, to a lesser degree, his son, Geoff moves from the city to the home he is building by the ocean and, ultimately, is left isolated and alone. MacGillivray splits this study of alienated idealism into temporal shards, fragments we must piece together. Indeed, the first scene in the film has Geoff and his son Sammy watching 8mm home movies about happier times, about the past, before all this change was precipitated by Geoff's decision. As Peter Harcourt observes, "...there is in MacGillivray's work a constant play between what is present and what has passed – in fact, often a destabilization of the present in relation to the past."<sup>7</sup>

Beginning with *Aerial View*, then, we witness the development of a poetics of destabilizing disclosure which will characterize all of MacGillivray's fictions; it is a poetics which insists upon the spectator's awareness of his or her own limitations of knowledge and apprehension. Connected to the notion of limited knowledge, this film demonstrates that an aerial view is but one of many. Concretely speaking within the narrative of the film, that view has become one of panoptic triumphant capitalism, as indicated in the film's final line. Geoff's former partner, Ross, having peered out from a small plane at Geoff's 'locally produced' coastal house in the midst of prime development real estate, says to his pilot, 'Let's get out of here, this is costing me money.' In a commercialized culture of vertical orientation, from corporate hierarchies to the 'vertically integrated' film and television industry (now in place in Nova Scotia, too), MacGillivray's first

major film constitutes a plea for horizontal space, for the horizon itself, for a point of view other than that of the one from above.

*Stations* (1983) extends these formal and thematic approaches across the entire landscape of Canada. Set on a train trip from British Columbia to Newfoundland, the film follows troubled television journalist, Tom Murphy, as he travels from Vancouver to a difficult family reunion and funeral in St. John's. Murphy's personal journey, initiated and haunted by the suicide of Harry, a close friend and former colleague in a Catholic seminary, is further complicated by his television station's assigning him to produce a documentary of the trip, to capture aspects of the Canadian identity from coast to coast.

In addition to its pan-Canadian portrait of individual angst, *Stations* investigates our the use of images (television, Polaroid snapshots, home movies, etc) as means to understand and articulate personal, national, even regional identities. This gives the film a rich self-reflexive dimension. There is a concern for the cultural force of orality in the form of songs, conversations, and personal interviews structured into the film. As an image based culture is, according to Innis' formulation, a space-biased one which deforms our sense of time and an oral-based culture is time-biased, *Stations* is an exploration of perhaps *the* modern cultural struggle between temporal and spatial forms of communication.viii<sup>8</sup> Consistently intelligent, restlessly inquisitive of its own powers of representation, and visually authoritative, *Stations* probes the complex and *Canadian* cultural relationship between time and space. It depicts a Canada in motion, in flux across vast space.

While many examples may be seen to denote the presence of the temporal, in the Innisian sense, its insinua-

tion is to be experienced, indeed discovered, in the film's formal structure. Peter Harcourt has noted, "...while the films both have structurally a beginning, a middle, and an end, this structure does not correspond to the narrative time of the film....Both *Aerial View* and *Stations* refuse any sense of an unfolding present tense."<sup>ix</sup> This refusal foregrounds our consciousness of time as a construct while it examines the epistemological implications of that consciousness. It is not simply a question of how we know what we know, or what the film discloses to us, but rather an inquiry into how we construct our understanding of things *in time* and, given the pan-Canadian settings of the film's narrative journey, across space.

In *Life Classes* (1987), MacGillivray pursues similar thematic directions and expands considerably upon the spatial-temporal Innisian paradigm. Paradoxically, this paradigm is explored in a narrative far more linear in its construction, spatially and temporally speaking. *Life Classes* is the story of Mary Cameron. Made pregnant by her feckless satellite dish salesman boyfriend, Earl, she leaves Cape Breton to have her child in Halifax. A single mother working in a department store, she supplements her income by modeling nude at a local art school. Encouraged by friends, she is soon developing her own artistic talents, abandoning her paint-by-number sets to draw her own sketches. At once an eloquent portrait of self-discovery and an investigation of the mysterious processes of making art, *Life Classes* also ponders how imported cultural norms and attitudes, whether from cultural 'centres' in Europe or the United States, can be imposed on the individual imagination. This process of discovery, carried out amid the clutter of art school jargon and the visual clamour of an image-saturated mass culture, is rooted in Mary's rural, localized cultural

traditions. As its very title suggests, *Life Classes* is concerned with how life is lived, or, more precisely, how life *can* be lived.

In *Life Classes*, the idea of the modern, or more precisely its assumed embodiment and expression in modern art, is encountered by Mary as a system of knowledge to which she has little or no access. The idea of 'modern' itself comes from elsewhere, from distant 'centres' in Europe and, more recently, the urban United States. Attending a lecture on contemporary art on Vassily Kandinsky, Jackson Pollack and other 'abstract impressionists,' Mary hears that, with regard to visual arts, the 20th Century has witnessed New York replacing Paris and London as the pre-eminent centre of thought and practice in modern art. She also attends a lecture by a German artist. This particular artist's technologically produced artifacts and her utterly closed conceptual theoretical discussions about them constitute another argument of authorized 'modern' expression. In this instance, it is a theoretically sanitized and sanctioned centre of European aesthetic philosophical discourse which, for MacGillivray and his heroine, is to be interrogated from the 'margins' of artistic production and individual experience.

The idea that the modern is thought to be an exclusively urban construction is acknowledged, but it is also contested. Mary Cameron is a modern woman *not* because she leaves rural Nova Scotia for urban Halifax, but because she searches for a balanced re-creation of rural and urban, centre and margin. In this sense, Mary embodies a dialectics of contemporary Canada, post-colonial yet still colonized, anticipated in Innis' writings. As Jody Berland observes, "For Innis, as for any theorist of colonialism and imperialism, the notion of the margin implies a notion of the centre and of a necessary, dialectic-

tically productive relationship between the two."<sup>10</sup> The aforementioned lecture on modern art and the encounter with the German artist reflect the limitations and the possibilities of this dialectic. A central dramatic passage in MacGillivray's exploration of this notion of a 'dialectically productive relationship' is can be found in the sequence in which Mary and her friend Gloria agree to participate in a multi-media 'happening' being organized in Halifax by a visiting New York video artist. Located somewhere between the technological utopianism of Marshall McLuhan and a peculiarly mediated version of 'primal scream' therapy, the 'performance' features two men and two women, each with a musician, singing or simply talking about their pasts while standing naked in vertical clear plastic tubes. As the subjects and musicians interact, several cameras circulate, beaming the images of the participants via satellite back to New York. Not without a sly and satirical edge, this sequence weaves together several centre-margin discourses: visual and oral cultures, metropolis and hinterland, United States of America and Canada.

On one level this sequence is a critique of the processes of cultural imperialism. Faraway New York audiences will consume the personal and abstracted confessions of the participants, who, in true colonial fashion, have been paid in advance. While this multi-media 'happening' can be regarded in many ways as exploitative, it also has unintended and positive consequences. Thanks to erratic and unprotected satellite signals, the performance is beamed back to Mary's Cape Breton home and is seen by Earl and her father. By this technological accident, her personal admissions are finally heard by the very people who need to hear them. The technological experience as represented here is highly ambiguous; it is alienating, controlled and commodified by others and intended for

other purposes, yet it allows, however accidentally, extraordinary intimacy and interpersonal communication. At another level, the transcendence of space by this form of mass media involves foreign control, but also contains indigenous local knowledge. As does Harold Innis in "The Bias of Communication,"<sup>11</sup> MacGillivray recognizes the paradoxes and dialectics of an era dominated by space-biased communication technologies: they can at once erase and affirm local specificity. Again, Berland's commentary is useful: "For Innis it is the capacities of communication technologies which enable this simultaneous integration and extrusion of colonized territories."<sup>xii</sup><sup>12</sup> In addition to *Life Classes*'s demonstration of the ambiguities of technological experience, it also dramatizes the struggle to resist those 'monopolies of knowledge' Innis associated with increasingly space-biased media of communication. In a world of accelerated cultural homogeneity and ahistorical materialism, Mary claims her own marginal space and time in her drawings. She actively negotiates the representation of her own experience and comprehension of what is central and what is marginal.

For MacGillivray, then, perhaps *the* characteristic feature of being modern, in Atlantic Canada or elsewhere, is refusal. It is a refusal anchored in the conscious act of reinterpreting established spatially-biased epistemologies and all the social, political, and moral prescriptions which may flow from them. This is not a clinging to the traditional in the face of change. On the contrary, it is a conscious effort to confront the nature and significance of change itself.

This question of where, and perhaps when, 'life is' finds its most self-conscious expression, formally and thematically, in MacGillivray's fifth feature fiction film, *Understanding Bliss* (1991). Its examination of an intense,



passionate relationship in the process of collapse incorporates into its very intimate drama broader ideas of centre-margin, alienation, identity, and region. The film is also, with *Life Classes*, MacGillivray's most thorough and complex interrogation of the notion of the modern within the Innisian paradigm of space-time biases of communication.

As we have seen, MacGillivray's cinema regards its regional setting as complex, serious, and, paradoxically, almost incidental. It also ignores stereotypical representations of the Atlantic region as a good-natured yet unsophisticated cultural backwater, a stereotype to be found in films from central Canada like Donald Shebib's *Goin' Down The Road* (1970) and present in varying degrees from Peter Carter's *Rowdyman* to John N. Smith's *Welcome To Canada* (1989) to Mort Ransen's *Margaret's Museum* (1995) to Allan Moyle's *New Waterford Girl* (1999). For MacGillivray, while the 'regional' context of his films does resonate thematically, it neither determines the films' meanings nor their characters' possibilities. In *Understanding Bliss*, the study of a failed relationship between a woman from Toronto and a man from Newfoundland, this problematic notion of region is foregrounded.

*Understanding Bliss* is the story of Peter Breen, a Cultural Studies professor in St. John's, and Elizabeth Sutton, a professor of English and an expert on the life and writings of New Zealand author, Katherine Mansfield. She travels from Toronto to St. John's to give a talk about Mansfield, including a complete public reading of the short story, "Bliss." Having had several encounters at various academic conferences, Peter and her resume their affair in St. John's, where she meets Peter's father and sister, Mae, and experiences the specific cultural context that has shaped Peter's life and thought. While she

prepares for her reading performance, Peter's class gets ready to perform a traditional Mummer's Play. As the day passes, the two characters begin to realize that more than Canadian geography separates them. After her ill-attended reading, videotaped for Peter by Mae, the forlorn Elizabeth goes to Peter's class and is a decidedly uncomfortable participant in a raucous rehearsal of the Mummer's Play. Afterwards, back in her hotel room, the relationship is brought to a bitter conclusion.

Over the course of the film Peter and Elizabeth's respective regional identifications are gradually revealed to be not only sources of strength and identity, but also evidence of serious personal limitation and alienation. MacGillivray conflates this regional problematic with the idea of the modern as it is understood to inform the style and the production of meaning in cultural texts, be they literary, folkloric, filmic, or theatrical, *or* be they produced in Toronto or St. John's. Much of *Understanding Bliss* is organized around the interrogation of the assumptions underlying the construction of such terms as 'region' and 'modern' as they are embodied or imagined to exist in the two main characters. Reminding us, as Peter does Elizabeth, to 'remember where you are,' this film examines precisely how complex and differentiated those ways of 'being modern' can be.

In *Understanding Bliss*, it is impossible to forget where you are. From the cinematographic inscription of the city with Steadicam tracking shots, to the main characters walking through the hills and streets and alleys of downtown St. John's, to the recurring images of the harbour and the city's architecture, to the insistent fog horns and montage of voices layered in the sound edit, there is a densely textured, firmly constructed sense of place. That sense of place is also articulated in various ways in the

dialogue. Elizabeth invokes Peter's description of St. John's, in Canadian terms, as the "Far East." Peter himself describes Elizabeth to his father as his "friend from away," and St. John's itself as "a walking town" and "a very small and nosy community." All this insistence on the consciousness of place in *Understanding Bliss* is not to make the film more 'regional.' Nor is it to embrace uncritical discourses of the Newfoundland "Folk," as described in McKay's work, but rather it is to put the construct of 'region' into a state of flux, and to dismantle the centre-margin paradigm which validates one particular understanding of it. The concept of region is thoroughly ventilated in this film: it is acknowledged, affirmed, demystified, critiqued, and, most important of all, contextualized. The process of illuminating the contexts of cultural expression, his characters' and his own, is central to all of MacGillivray's cinema. This process is especially apparent, of course, in *Understanding Bliss*, as both characters are directly engaged in the creation, interpretation, and validation of various kinds of cultural texts in specific contexts.

If Elizabeth's encounter with this new context moved her, as she describes the thematic trajectory of Mansfield's "Bliss," from 'superficiality' to 'realization,' Peter Breen's awareness of context informs his whole being. This awareness underlines his sense of how the processes of various forms of cultural imperialism can elide difference and erode the very voice of context itself. "Tell your own stories, get to know who *you* are, yourselves." Peter argues, continuing, "You must contribute either by listening to a story or, even better, by telling a story." Peter's is an active, participatory conception of culture which privileges the cultural power of the storytelling process, or, as he puts it, "the event of the story being told." For Peter,

the relationship between the event and its context is critical, as he tells his students, "You see, the context alters – it changes, it adds to it, diminishes it, enlarges it, expands the meaning of the piece." He also argues for the temporal bias of individual or community storytelling as a strategy to resist processes of cultural homogenization. As he concludes, "None of this is new; it's ancient, ancient, ancient stuff, but it never ever ever ceases to be relevant." In this affirmation of the temporally-biased, oral forms of indigenously produced cultural expression, MacGillivray reiterates that the modern resides in the ancient and the ancient is a constituent part of the modern. That this argument is made from a putatively marginal culture in Canada reflects how MacGillivray's cinema is engaged in troubling accepted notions of where and when ideas of the 'modern' and the 'centre' are produced.

While these tensions operate at the level of the narrative itself, they are also inscribed in the film's specific formal and material construction. Shot and edited on video equipment, the completed *Understanding Bliss* was then printed onto 35mm film. There exists no 'negative' of the film. In one sense, it is not a 'film' at all, but rather an in-between form of motion picture. The reasons for this production and aesthetic decision are both practical and philosophical. That experimental pragmatism is underlined by MacGillivray's exploring ideas of temporality in a medium known for its disposability and even spatial promiscuity. In a film that at one level is about how we affiliate ourselves with various systems of representation (literature, theatre, film, architecture, and ultimately, language), it is fitting that the very medium itself is under investigation.

In MacGillivray's work, then, what is inside the frame always has a dialectical relationship with what is outside

the frame, whether within the narrative logic or thematic patterns of the films themselves or in the terms of how those very films are materially produced. An integral and complex component of this dialectic relationship is the idea and the reality of place. Of the presence of place in his work as a storyteller, MacGillivray contends that "The politics of it can be irrelevant; the *awareness* of it is essential."xiii<sup>13</sup> This idea of place is bound up in Canada with, as mentioned above, an institutionalized concept of 'regionalism,' which emerges out of the centre-margin historical and economic paradigm described by Harold Innis and other Canadian scholars. In the work of William D. MacGillivray, the implications of place are complicated and render problematic accepted ideas of region and further complicate the centre-margin paradigm with a re-imagining of its assumptions and definitions.

#### IV. HERE IS HERE

In *Technology and the Canadian Mind*, Arthur Kroker offers a characterization of Canada as an 'in-between' nation, suspended between the old, historically attentive European empire and the revolutionary, technologically adept, and future-orientated empire of the United States of America.xiv<sup>14</sup> If we take Kroker's idea and relate it to the communications theory of Harold Innis, Canada can be seen to be suspended between time-biased European culture and space-biased American culture. The task of Canadian culture, in a sense, becomes the balancing of these biases and how they are expressed, mediated, and understood. The reality is at once less and more complicated than that, but these theoretical terms are useful inasmuch as they situate Canada positively as a place apart, a place outside, a place of self-created and resistant exile. Taking

these terms into a consideration of Canada itself, if we accept the defined borders between centre and margin, or centre and region as outlined or assumed in the discourses of Canadian history, politics, and film studies, MacGillivray's work can be seen as emerging from a similar place of creative resistance. If Canada is an 'in-between' nation, then MacGillivray is an 'in-between' filmmaker.

That a modern culture exists and is to be explored in Atlantic Canada is a given; it is the rich complexity of that culture that compels MacGillivray's cinema. If we accept a combination of Ortega y Gasset's and Innis' conceptions of culture as a starting from a point of view and expressed in spatial and temporal balance, then the cinema of William D. MacGillivray constitutes an exploration of the drama inherent in this combination. That it does so in the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century, and is articulated in a context in which, as Fredric Jameson asserts, "...the ultimate form of commodity reification in contemporary consumer society is the image itself,"<sup>xv</sup><sup>15</sup> reflects MacGillivray's counter-cultural regard for images as a mode of resistance. He uses images *not* as a form of commodity reification, but rather as a medium within which to question such processes of reification and to insist upon, returning to Fuentes, the 'mind's power for analogy and unity in a world thrust into differentiation.' Though clearly and firmly rooted in contemporary Atlantic Canada, MacGillivray's cinema, like that of Pedersen, Jones, Fitzgerald, Jean, and others, seeks to locate its so-called regional concerns into larger questions of alienation, technology, identity, memory, and possibilities of personal transcendence. It is a modern cinematic cultural practice that emerges out of a 'point of view' acutely aware of its context, inquisitive about its ontology, and affirmative of its presence in the processes of time.

Having struggled to make their films in a community of independent enthusiasts and out of no sustained feature filmmaking tradition, Atlantic Canadian filmmakers have established particular production methods to realize their own particular cinematic tradition. Interestingly, that tradition has resembled until recently more the European, auteurist approach than the American Industrial model. Owing perhaps to their maritime rather than North American continental perspective, the films of this region also reveal more European than American cinematic influences in their approaches to narrative, film style, and character. Whatever the external models and influences, Atlantic Canadian filmmaking has evolved predominantly from the independent, non-industrial approach to film production, although more commercially-oriented filmmaking practices did emerge out of these independent beginnings, particularly in the last decade. In fact that latter emergence has come to predominate, with the recent development of a more industrial based film and television industry concentrated in Halifax.

Emerging from the dark absence which followed after *Evangeline* left Nova Scotia in 1913, the new Atlantic Canadian cinema, now just over three decades old, has created some of the most enduring works in contemporary Canadian cinema. Its creative daring and intellectual rigour have also dislodged established images of a part of Canada long absent from the process of representing itself on the screen. Important, articulate, and *central* to the Canadian cinema, for they have also redefined notions of marginality, the filmmakers of Atlantic Canada do not concern themselves with absence; they are engaged in a process of illuminating the cinematic possibilities of their own astonishing presence.<sup>x</sup>

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<sup>x</sup> The author wishes to thank Michael Waters for research assistance.

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## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> David Adams Richards, *River of the Brokenhearted* (Doubleday, Toronto, 2003, p. 36)
- <sup>2</sup> For example: American director Randa Haines' *Children of a Lesser God* (1986), shot in New Brunswick, as well as Dutch filmmaker Heddy Honigman's *Mindshadows* (1987), set in Nova Scotia but essentially a Dutch film. Not to belabour the point or to denigrate the film, it is worth mentioning that *Welcome to Canada* (1989), produced by the NFB's Montreal studio and directed by Montreal director John N. Smith, also belongs in this category. Nicholas Kendall's execrable *Cadillac Girls* (1993), Mort Ransen's *Margaret's Museum* (1995, and, to a lesser extent, Allan Moyle's *New Waterford Girl* (1999) also fall into this category. For examples of this phenomenon and an analysis of its production and consumption, please see Ian McKay's *The Quest of the Folk* (McGill-Queen's, Montreal, 1994).
- <sup>3</sup> See Noreen Golfman, "Imagining Region" in William Beard, Jerry White, eds. *North of Everything* (University of Alberta Press, Edmonton, 2003).
- <sup>4</sup> Jose Ortega y Gasset, *The Modern Theme* (Harper Torchbooks, New York, 1961,. Trans. James Cleugh), p. 60.
- <sup>5</sup> Carlos Fuentes, *Myself With Others* (Farrar Strauss Giroux, New York, 1988), pp. 49-50.
- <sup>6</sup> Harold Innis, "A Plea For Time," in Daniel Drache, ed. *Staples, Markets, and Cultural Change* (McGill-Queen's Press, Montreal-Kingston, 1995), p. 375.
- <sup>7</sup> Peter Harcourt, "Planting Pictures: and appreciation of the films of William D. MacGillivray," *Cinema Canada* (Montreal, November 1987), p. 16.
- <sup>8</sup> Innis, in Drache, pp. 356-383.
- <sup>9</sup> Harcourt, p. 16.
- <sup>10</sup> Jody Berland, "Space at the Margins: Critical Theory and colonial space after Innis," (Unpublished paper, Toronto, 1995), p. 5.
- <sup>11</sup> Innis, in Drache, "The Bias of Communications," pp. 325-349.
- <sup>12</sup> Berland, p. 10.
- <sup>13</sup> Interview with the author, 17 July 2000.
- <sup>14</sup> Arthur Kroker, "The Canadian Discourse," in *Technology and the Canadian Mind* (New Directions, Montreal, 1984), pp. 7-13.
- <sup>15</sup> Frederic Jameson, *Signatures of the Visible* (Routledge, New York, 1990), pp.11-12.



## CHAPTER 10

### **A Typically Canadian Cinema: Filmmaking in Alberta, its Institutions and Authors.**

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Alberta filmmaking is not exactly at the forefront of the Canadian cinematic imagination. If pressed, most Canadian cinephiles could probably come up with a filmmaker or two that hailed from, or seemed vaguely connected to, Alberta (um, yeah, isn't Anne Wheeler from Alberta?.... *The War Bride*, that was, um, Albertan, right?). This is not good, for filmmaking in Alberta has actually evolved in ways that echo important cinematic trends in 90s and 00s Canadian cinema, in terms of form, thematic concerns, and institutional issues. It is fitting that this collection should conclude with an article on Alberta, for this region, long at the fringes of our cinematic imagination, is actually quite a microcosm for Canadian cinema of the past twenty years.

## Institutions

Perhaps the most widely known aspect of “Alberta Filmmaking” is the fact that parts of Clint Eastwood’s *Unforgiven* (1991) were shot near Lethbridge. This, of course, echoes some pretty unhappy parts of Canadian film history. To say that *Unforgiven* is the best-known Albertan film is like saying that *Porky’s* is the most successful Canadian film of all time: both statements are basically true, both statements are basically depressing, and both statements distort more than they explain.

The Alberta Film Commission (AFC) emerged in 1972 to do basically the same job done by most U.S. State film commissions, and, sadly, by many national film boards: to market the place to Hollywood film producers as a cheap location. Bill Marsden, a former Film Commissioner for the province, wrote in his book *Big Screen Country* that “[t]his was. the first government office in Canada to promote locations for the production of Hollywood movies.”<sup>1</sup> That this is taken to be an unambiguously positive development is typical of the policy thinking that has dominated the province, as we shall see. Part of this thinking, of course, is the honestly held belief that the presence of regular production of work, Hollywood or otherwise, should lead to, and sustain, a pool of trained and experienced professionals, and so contribute to the development of Canadian cinema generally. In 1981 the Alberta Motion Picture Development Corporation (AMPDC) was established, and operated under the umbrella of the AFC. As Lindia Kupeck recounts, “Headed by entertainment lawyer Lorne MacPherson, the AMPDC started as a development lending bank, expanded into partial equity financing, and in its 15-year existence, invested \$16-million in Alberta

projects.”<sup>2</sup> As the name suggests, that body was more or less modeled after the Canadian Film Development Corporation, which was created in 1967 with the aspiration of making Canadian cinema as vibrant as Québec cinema. There was some idealism in the air about the possibility of building a local cinema, and Denyse Therrien wrote approvingly in a 1991 book on English-Canadian cinema (published by Montréal’s Cinémathèque Québécoise) that “L’Alberta devient donc la première province anglophone à mettre sur pied un tel organisme d’aide au cinéma.” But of course it was not to be, as Therrien, among others, could see. “Jamais cependant, la province ne renonça à son rêve de mettre sur pied une industrie de services pour attirer les Américains.”<sup>3</sup> What ended up happening, as with so many like-minded film development initiatives is that Alberta simply became a relatively cheap place for Hollywood crews in search of any imaginable cost-cutting strategy. Some training did occur as a result of the increased work, but it’s hard to ascribe much of it to the emergence of any distinctive Albertan filmmaking, or an economically beneficial film industry. As has been made abundantly clear in the first part of this anthology, art and industry pull such development initiatives in opposite directions. The attempt in Alberta, as in many similar Canada-wide initiatives, to bring them both “together at last,” was hardly a resounding success: the AMPDC was never able to shore up much in terms of either art or industry.

Given this, it is not surprising that, in 1996, Alberta’s Tory government, utterly obsessed with eliminating the provincial debt, shut down the Alberta Film Commission and eliminated the financial incentives provided by the AMPDC. The outcry among industry professionals was loud, but it was clear that there was

very little industrial argument to be made. Furthermore, the AMPDC had not gone much out of its way to help lower-budget or independent filmmakers, so there was not much artistic or cultural argument to be made either. Gary Burns, about whom more will be said shortly, was just starting work on his second feature *Kitchen Party* (1997) when the provincial funding structure fell apart. He told Toronto's *Eye Weekly* that "The Alberta Motion Picture Development Corporation collapsed right before we inked the deal.... They closed their doors and gave their remaining cash to *North Of 60* and *Jake And The Kid*, two big shows that didn't need the money. Then B.C. Film approached us with \$115,000, so we filmed in Vancouver."<sup>4</sup> In 2002, a governmental body called Alberta Film sprang up to market the province to prospective producers. According to its website ([albertafilm.ca](http://albertafilm.ca)), it consolidated the operations of the Alberta Film Commission and the Film Development Office. They give no financial incentives; their website optimistically states "Q: What tax credits are available in the province of Alberta? A: A tax credit is not available. We don't need a tax credit to give you the best deal in Canada. In a recent study comparing the cost of production in Calgary, Toronto and Vancouver, it was determined that the Alberta costs were lowest, despite the credits offered in the other locales."<sup>5</sup> This is perhaps a harsher version of the Canadian experience; tax credits have not been particularly successful on a national level at building a feature film industry, but some form of incentive does still remain.

The Alberta experience still speaks volumes about the priorities and failures of film development policy in this country in the last few decades. Cultural or artistic questions were largely ignored, seeming to be too much of a luxury for a place trying to build an industry; when it

turned out that an indigenous industry was not economically viable in the long term, the entire cinematic initiative collapsed, only to be reborn as a shadow of its former self. Indeed, some film support does remain, administered through the Alberta Foundation for the Arts. They break grants into three sections, according to their website: "Individual Film and Video Projects (individuals/unincorporated groups); Cultural Industry Film Grants (incorporated but no distribution deal in place); Alberta Film Development Program (commercial films with distribution deal.) The website gives the budget of the Alberta Film Development Program [*sic*] as \$11 million, noting that each year they get support around 1,200 projects.<sup>6</sup>

Although this is a significant amount of money, it is clear that the building of a sustainable film industry has gone more or less by the wayside. According to Alberta Film's website, the maximum grant that a single film can get is 20% of the production expenses, up to \$750,000.<sup>7</sup> Some money for filmmaking is still present in Alberta, but it is not difficult to detect a certain disconnect in the funding strategy. Filmmaking is still seen from a business-development standpoint, but the actual amount of money available has a rather non-profit quality to it. A similar provincial-national relationship can be seen in the evolution of the NFB's Studio One, which has already been discussed by Allan Ryan in his contribution to this book. Maria de Rosa has documented how the NFB, building on work done by the Aboriginal Film and Video Art Alliance, established an Aboriginal film studio in 1991, roughly modeled after their acclaimed "woman's studio" Studio D.<sup>8</sup> Studio One was based in Edmonton, and was under the leadership of Graydon McCrea, head producer of the NFB's Northwest centre. Even though its aims were ostensibly national, there was a distinctively regional

quality to the operation; as de Rosa also notes, one of the first people to approach McCrea were filmmaker Will Campbell and Native Studies professor Roger Trottier, both from neighbouring Saskatchewan.<sup>9</sup> But it is not at all clear how much of a community ever really developed around Studio One. For although it had all the administrative hallmarks of the NFB's other great studios and units (Studio D, the B-Unit, etc.), Edmonton never had the facilities to create a kind of gathering place for filmmakers (apart from a ten-day workshop on film production in 1991, one of Studio One's first initiatives). D.B. Jones, in his history of the post-1980 NFB, evokes the image of the cafeteria at the Montréal NFB headquarters. When he first came there in the 1970s, it was full of filmmakers and technicians arguing and discussing as they broke bread; when he went there in 2000 to start his research, "I had the cafeteria to myself."<sup>10</sup> This loss of a physical community is partially the reflection of 1990s budget cuts that gripped the NFB nationwide, but that doesn't tell the full story. The 1990s NFB de-centralised with a vengeance, breaking apart what was left of the old "studio system" and transforming itself, in essence, into a grant-giving agency. Staff filmmakers became, for the most part, a thing of the past; everybody submitted a project proposal and the NFB could cherry-pick.

Studio One, though, never really had a cafeteria to empty out. Its mandate was national, and for the most part, its projects were produced away from Edmonton. *No Turing Back* (1997, Gregory Coves) went to Aboriginal communities all across Canada to take the pulse in the wake of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples; *Laxwesa Wa: Strength of the River* (1995, Barb Cramner) documented traditional fishing in Northern BC; and *Picturing a People: George Johnston, Tlingit Photographer*

(1996, Carol Geddes) dealt with the Yukon and Alaska. *Forgotten Warriors* (1997, Loretta Todd) dealt quite a bit with communities in Alberta, and it is probably the most "Albertan" film produced by this ostensibly Albertan studio. When Studio One was broken up in 1996, it was replaced by the Aboriginal Filmmaking Program, which, as de Rosa writes, "received a significant increase in resources, with the NFB's English Program Branch earmarking \$1 million a year to be used exclusively for productions or co-productions with independent Aboriginal filmmakers across the country."<sup>11</sup> This rhetoric of "across the country" even popped up in parliamentary proceedings, with Sandra McDonald, the NFB commissioner, telling the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage that "we are replacing Studio One, which was localized in Edmonton, with a pool of money which will be available for aboriginal film-makers to use but which can [be] used from any of our production centres across Canada."<sup>12</sup> This is quite deceptive, giving the impression that only Edmontonians could gain access to the Studio's resources and that the rest of the country was shut out. Quite the opposite was actually the case; the degree to which Studio One was meaningfully "localized in Edmonton" is questionable. Edmontonian Gil Cardinal, now one of Canada's best known Aboriginal filmmakers (he is Métis) and even during the Studio One era quite well known for his 1987 film *Foster Child*, never worked with the Studio. The province's for-profit development strategy never managed to involve many Albertan filmmakers as directors; much the same was true, unfortunately, of the province's best-known non-profit film development strategy. This moment in Alberta's cine-institutional history is also nationally important, though, because it was a preview of the NFB to come. Even before the break-up of Studio One,

it provided a model of a flexible, essentially space-less "Studio." Studio One was the prototype of the decentralised, NFB-as-granting-body that we know today.

The other crucial institutional structure supporting Albertan filmmaking is, just like everywhere else in Canada, the co-op system. Alberta actually has a relatively burgeoning co-op community, with several organisations of varying sizes in both Calgary and Edmonton, in addition to a few smaller operations in smaller communities. The co-ops most central to independent film production in the province are Film and Video Arts in Edmonton (FAVA, founded in 1982) and the Calgary Society of Independent Filmmakers (CSIF, founded in 1978), both of which provide access to a wide range of basic filmmaking production tools and courses. Calgary is also the home to more specialised co-ops such as the Quickdraw Animation Society (which also has a considerable exhibition component), Emmedia (centred on video and audio art), and NUTV (an experimental, open-access television station based at the University of Calgary). This is a considerably more vibrant scene than what would be found in Saskatchewan or even Manitoba (even though Alberta lacks a truly high-profile auteur like Winnipeg's Guy Maddin), and while the independent production infrastructures of Toronto, Montréal and Vancouver remain unrivalled in Canada, budding independent filmmakers in Alberta actually have a fair bit of support. This is something of a contradiction of the conventional wisdom; Therrien, for one, opined that:

L'Alberta, en dehors d'Anne Wheeler, n'occupe pas beaucoup de place sur le marché du long métrage. Ce n'est pas un hasard si le Festival de Banff honore la production télévisuelle autant que ciné-



matographique. Le salut résiderait dans le petit écran. Les cinéastes des Prairies restent longtemps accrochés au court métrage et au documentaire avant de passer au long métrage de fiction et y reviennent par la suite très souvent. Découragés par l'indifférence des dirigeants politiques face à la culture – en Saskatchewan plus qu'ailleurs, dirait-on – plusieurs cinéastes s'exilent vers l'Ontario ou la Colombie-Britannique.<sup>13</sup>

While the Alberta government has long been basically indifferent to cultural matters,<sup>14</sup> and this has been very frustrating for the province's community of artists, independent filmmakers in Alberta are better off than Therrien suggests. Indeed, the sheer pessimism of Francophone scholars on the topic of Prairie filmmaking is striking. In a 1992 collection on Canadian cinema (published by Paris' Centre Georges Pompidou), Franco-Manitoban critic Gilles Herbert marvelled at the sheer existence of an interesting feature film made on the Prairies, in this case Joe Viszmeg's feature *City of Champions* (1990):

Grâce à la coopération des comédiens et de l'équipe technique et malgré l'attitude de ceux qui contrôlaient les moyens de production, Joe Viszmeg a réussi l'impossible : un film léché qui mérite qu'on l'étudie pour ce qu'il est, plutôt que pour les prouesses qui en ont permis le tournage.<sup>15</sup>

The *impossible*? Franco-literate Albertans were no doubt grateful for the interest in the local cinema, but such shock at a mere sign of life ends up turning the discussion a bit towards the realm of the patronising, not to mention the ill-informed.

## Authors

There are plenty of films made in Alberta, or by Albertans, that are worth talking about for more interesting reasons than “les prouesses qui en ont permis le tournage.” Some of these filmmakers have come out of the ill-fated attempts at building an industry, some have emerged from the co-ops, and some have come out of the NFB system. Anne Wheeler, Gary Burns and Gil Cardinal make good examples of each of these three phenomena.

If I had been writing this essay twenty years ago, I would probably start this paragraph with “Anne Wheeler is Alberta’s best-known filmmaker” or some such statement. Wheeler did a great deal in the 1980s to put Alberta on the Canadian cinematic map, with well-liked features such as *Loyalties* (1986), *Cowboys Don’t Cry* (1988), and *Bye-Bye Blues* (1989). These were filmed in Alberta, prominently featured Albertan actors such as Tantoo Cardinal in *Loyalties* or Francis Damberger in *Cowboys Don’t Cry*, and richly evoked the culture of the Prairies.

But I would be a fool to make that statement today; Anne Wheeler is no longer particularly well-known, and she is no longer an Alberta filmmaker. Since the 1990s she has lived and worked mostly in Vancouver, and since the 1990s her work has taken on a distinctively lower profile in Canadian cinema. *Better than Chocolate* (1999), a vanilla-sweet lesbian love story, was followed by two tales of middle-aged love, *Marine Life* (2000) and *Suddenly Naked* (2001). All of these films centred on strong female protagonists, recalling not only her 1980s work but also her start at Studio D. But also like her 1980s films, they were entirely straightforward narratives with strong roots in melodrama, with very little to distinguish them from a television movie. It should come as no surprise, then, that

Wheeler actually spent most of the 1990s working on television productions, directing a TV adaptation on Margaret Laurence's *The Diviners* (1993) in addition to episodes of series such as "Da Vinci's Inquest," "Cold Squad," and, more recently, "This is Wonderland." "Da Vinci's Inquest," surely the best of these series, has actually been something of a refuge for a number of prominent Canadian filmmakers, including Sturla Gunnarsson, William Fruet, John L'Ecuyer and Lynn Stopkewich. But of these filmmakers, Wheeler is closest to Gunnarsson, another director of competent, middlebrow pictures who now mostly lives on television (Gunnarsson recently directed the Alberta-produced TV movie *100 Days in the Jungle*), than she is to edgy and innovative younger filmmakers like L'Ecuyer or Stopkewich, for whom the TV work is a means to earn a living between films.

So it's tempting to read Wheeler's career in the terms spelled out by Denyse Therrien, as an example of an Albertan exiling herself to British Columbia once she became too successful for the small potatoes of the Prairies. But it's actually another Francophone critic and another province that I'd like to invoke here to explain Wheeler, and a lot of her contemporaries. Pierre Véronneau has written often and well on the subject of Quebec's first cycle of feature films, which appeared in the 1940s and 50s, including his well-known chapter in the original *Self Portrait*, "The First Wave of Quebec Feature Films: 1944-1953." He is explicit about how in many ways they are reactionary and regressive, but he sees a certain institutional importance there too, writing in 1992 that "Il faut souligner que plusieurs de ses artisans passent au service de la télévision ou de ses compagnies privées qui réalisent des séries pour celle-ci."<sup>16</sup> It is necessary to emphasise that something very similar happened with

Canadian cinema of the 1970s and 80s. During this period, a small feature/narrative industry emerged, just as it had in Quebec in the 1950s. As a group, these more recent English-Canadian films had more to offer in thematic and aesthetic terms than Duplessis-era French Canadian filmmaking. But these Anglophone films were also similar to their predecessors in more ways than many people probably care to imagine; many of them, like *Bye-Bye Blues*, tended towards the formally conventional and thematically nostalgic in a way that should be familiar to those who know the Quebec films of the 1950s. Production of those films in 1950s Quebec was not as sustainable as it was in 1970s and 80s English-Canada, but Anglo-filmmaking remained precarious and, just like in Quebec, the siren song of steady work in an expanding television sector was always audible. So a lot of English-Canadian filmmakers who hit their stride in the 1980s (some of whom were Albertan), exiled themselves not only to BC or Toronto, but to television, as many early French Canadian filmmakers had done in the mid-1950s. Anne Wheeler strikes me as a good example of this phenomenon.

Gary Burns might seem to be another example of an Albertan filmmaker exiling himself to BC and Montreal, but his career is actually very different from Wheeler's. His first feature was *The Suburbanators* (1994), filmed on the edges of Calgary and about nothing much in particular. It centred around three groups of aimless young people, all hanging around in a faceless suburban landscape, two sets looking for pot, the third trying to get their instruments back from an apartment whose resident has been evicted. With this first, rather minor feature, Burns did establish himself as a filmmaker with a sprawling sense of space and a finely tuned ear for

everyday dialogue. *The Suburbanators* was no masterpiece, but it was enough to get a career going.

That momentum seemed to stall just a bit when his second feature *Kitchen Party* (1997) hit the aforementioned snags with production funding, as the Alberta cine-infrastructure was beginning to crumble. At first this seemed to be a real shame, since *Kitchen Party* also dealt with the suburban *ennui* so central to the *Suburbanators*, and the impossibly sprawling suburban landscape of Calgary really is well-suited to that sort of meditation. But Burns recounted to the audience of the 1997 Local Heroes Film Festival in Edmonton that upon being forced into BC, he was so annoyed that he insisted that all of the license plates in the cars be removed; he didn't want people aware of his Calgarian heritage to think that he was somehow using Vancouver as a stand-in for Cowtown. Particularly obsessive viewers will notice that all of the cars in the film bear generic-looking Canada license plates, as though they were all military vehicles. One perhaps unintended effect of this (spiteful!) desire to eliminate all hints of geographical specificity is that the world of *Kitchen Party* literally becomes a faceless suburb.

*Kitchen Party* is a kind of expansion on the main ideas of *The Suburbanators*; it's about what a deadening, and yet oddly fascinating place the North American suburb can be. What is remarkable about the film is that it, also like *The Suburbanators*, avoids the pretentious "critique" of suburban normalcy found in roughly contemporary American films like *Pleasantville* (1998), *Happiness* (1998) or *American Beauty* (1999). Sure, the narrative tension derives from a little flourish of Stepfordesque insanity. All the teens assembled for a party at Scott's house have to remain in the kitchen because the rest of the house is vacuumed to such perfection that any

footsteps in the carpet will be visible to his parents when they return, and they have given him an ultimatum: no parties, otherwise, no help on University tuition. The strategies to avoid touching the carpet provide the most visceral illustration of the obsessive-compulsive nature of the bourgeois everyday; an insane motorcycle chase across a large park provides an equally visceral evocation of the constant threat of uncontrollable violence that lurks beneath all the well-tended lawns. That this is all couched in lightly comic and ironic terms is the key difference between Burns and his more self-important American colleagues.

Burns moved, essentially, from suburbs to downtown with his next film, *waydowntown* (2000), and also moved from film to video. While I wouldn't want to read too much into that, there is a sense in which the film marks a shift from an interest in nicely composed images of blandness to something that is more fluid and bustling, and video does compliment this nicely. But despite the frequently moving camera and the sense of openness and sprawl given by the network of connected office buildings and shopping malls (the film's narrative revolves around a bet made by some Calgary office workers about who can avoid going outside for the longest), the interest in *ennui* remains. Placing the film in the context of recent Canadian and Quebec film that deal with globalisation, Brenda Longfellow writes that "In *waydowntown*, the critique of work is articulated not so much in terms of exploitation, as in the classic Marxist categories of alienation and surplus value extraction, as it is in relation to boredom."<sup>17</sup> This sense of boredom, of longing, is always at the centre of Burns' sense of the Alberta experience. Aesthetics shift drastically between *The Suburbanators* and *waydowntown*: grassy subdivisions give way to walkway-

linked glass-and-steel office towers, film gives way to video. But what remains consistent is a sense of disconnection from place, a sense that the characters are floating more than existing. All of Burns' films are about literal Utopias; they are set no-place and, as such, they are not unlike the films of the Toronto New Wave discussed by Longfellow elsewhere in this collection.

This is truest of Burns' most recent film, *A Problem with Fear* (2003). This is set in a sort of urban composite; the underground scenes are clearly identifiable as Montreal by virtue of their baby blue subway cars (on which "STCUM" is sometimes visible), but the above-ground scenes are almost as clearly identifiable as the concrete canyons of Calgary (and those scenes were shot there). Again, the landscape is simultaneously sprawling and limiting, just like the burbs and malls of his earlier films. The dialogue in this film is far more stilted and the narrative situations far more ironic and artificial than in any of his previous work. Its look and feel recalls the shorts of his partner Donna Brunsdale, with whom he co-wrote the screenplay. Brunsdale also directed the feature *Cheerful Tearful* (1999), which centres on a woman's futile pursuit of therapy as a response to her sense of disconnection. But she has also made *Moments of Despondency* (1997), whose ten minutes catalogue a little universe of one woman's small disappointments (wishing she had ordered something else at a restaurant, watching a glob of toothpaste run down the drain). Neither *Moments of Despondency* nor *A Problem with Fear* abandon narrative realism altogether; self-consciously stilted though they may be, these are not works of Brechtian counter-cinema. And yet, both films are just as dissatisfied with conventional cinematic storytelling as their characters are with their lives of urban banality, lives and narrative strategies

that they can't quite let go of. Throughout his career, Burns has been trying to give a sense of how uncoupled so many aspects of middle-class life have become. *A Problem With Fear*, perhaps because of his collaboration with Brunsdale, is the closest he comes to giving that sense of I've-come-undone a truly cinematic visualisation.

So Burns is Alberta's poet of disconnection; Gil Cardinal, on the other hand, is the filmmaker who seems *enraciné* no matter where he is filming. And there is a way in which Burns is a sort of redemption of the largely mixed experience of feature filmmaking in Alberta; Cardinal has a similarly redemptive effect on the rather mixed experience of Studio One. Indeed, just as the support meant to encourage feature filmmaking on Alberta was eliminated before Burns could take advantage of it, the institution meant to create a community of Aboriginal filmmakers in Canada never did much for Cardinal; he never worked with Studio One. In all fairness, this is not entirely the fault of the NFB, and Cardinal would likely agree with that. When I asked him if he felt part of a community of Native filmmakers in Canada, he said:

No. I feel welcomed into the circle when I go, but I just don't participate. And it's something that bothers me a lot. Not so that I'd know what I can or should do about it. I mean, when I was at Sundance, years ago, at the Native forum, there were a lot of folks there. But I didn't feel part of their group. So it was hard to sit around at supper or at the bar and engage in whatever the talk was. I mean, it'd be better if I was in Winnipeg, or Kahnawake, or something, but mostly it's a personal thing.<sup>18</sup>



The sense that Cardinal is a sort of loner is what lead me to title our interview with him "Cowboy Filmmaking." He bristled at that title when I presented him with the book of which the interview is a part, joking that he was going to have to swap his headdress for a six-shooter. While on one level this was a lesson in the importance of pre-publication dialogue with interview subjects, I actually remain happy with the title. Cardinal is a sort of cowboy, an independent figure whose work is clearly related to both *cinéma vérité* and the Native film movement, but which makes important breaks from these pieces of film history as well.

The best example of this is his first widely seen film, *Foster Child* (1987). Cardinal had already made one short documentary film and then two short narratives, none of which dealt with Native issues as such: *Children of Alcohol* (1984, co-produced by Anne Wheeler), *Discussions in Bioethics: Courage of One's Convictions* (1985), and *Hotwalker* (1986). But *Foster Child* really did announce him as a filmmaker, both in terms of form and subject matter. It was a film about family life, a subject that would preoccupy him in one way or another throughout his career. It was a film that recovered the intimate subjectivity that *vérité* promised, taking its viewer into the emotional roller-coaster of Cardinal's search for his biological mother, a search that is continually complicated not only by official bureaucracy but by the complexities of familial relations. And it was a film that did so through an aesthetic pattern that borrowed some elements of *vérité* (long takes, hand-held camera, rambling interviews) at the same time that it rejected others (Cardinal is a constant presence on screen, and voice-over narration is key to the film's affect).

Family matters have been an ongoing concern for Cardinal. His first three films deal with this explicitly.

*Children of Alcohol* is comprised mostly of talking-heads interviews with young kids during a camping trip, and the toll that alcohol abuse has taken on their parents and, then, of course, on them. The film has a certain minimalism to it (it's almost entirely composed of interviews with the kids during a camping trip they take together), a minimalism that's complimented by the rather quotidian nature of their problems; their crises mostly stem from their being denied a simple, uncomplicated home life. His contribution to the *Discussion in Bioethics* series centres on a young Jehovah's Witness' refusal to accept a life-saving blood transfusion and the awkward dynamic that this creates between herself, her parents, and her doctor. *Hotwalker* focuses on an old horse trainer who sees that he could become a kind of foster-father figure for a kid just learning the ropes of the racecourse. All of this builds to *Foster Child*, an exploration of the way that Cardinal himself, bereft of his biological family partially because of substance abuse, came to form complicated but loving relationships with foster family members, but who also has frustrating experiences with institutions whose attention to procedure is reminiscent of the well-intentioned doctor in *Discussion in Bioethics*. And *Foster Child* then builds to Cardinal's film *Tikinagan* (1991), on which he began work shortly after finishing *Foster Child*.<sup>19</sup> That film dealt with the struggles of people in Sioux Lookout (a northern Ontario Cree community) to bring child welfare services under the control of the community, thereby ensuring that kids maintain a link to their culture even if the link with their biological parents is damaged or broken. In all of these films, Cardinal seems particularly interested in the ways that family ties quickly become complicated and painful, and how improvised, often non-biological solutions can often offer a perfectly reasonable

solution. In all these films, fosterage and kinship exist not in opposition to one another, but in a kind of dialectic. Fosterage and adoption, of course, are important parts of many Aboriginal cultures, and are particularly important in Métis culture. His work avoids sentimentalism about blood connection, and instead maintains a steely gaze at the powerful importance of family connections of all sorts.

Later films that have common subject matter with these early productions also point to important formal strains in Cardinal's films. *David with F.A.S.* (1997) is closely connected to *Children of Alcohol* (both deal with the kids of alcoholics); *The Spirit Within* (1990) is a portrait of Native spirituality programs that is, arguably, an evocation of the search for maturity via a father figure that can be seen on a much smaller scale in *Hotwalker*. But these two films, like a lot of Cardinal's work (and a lot of Alanis Obomsawin's work, for that matter), feature long, uninterrupted interviews where people sometimes seem to be rambling a bit but where the rhythms of their speech, the development of their thoughts, are visible on the screen. This is not so far from Pierre Perrault's idea of *cinéma de la parole*, although the photographic sensibility visible in so much of Perrault's work (often the result of Michel Brault's handling of the camera) is not present in the same way. What Cardinal has been developing throughout his career is closer to a *cinéma de témoignage*; he is always faced with interesting people and tries to give a sense of what being a witness of their testimony was like. The aesthetic feels less spontaneous than classic *vérité*, but it also feels a lot less detached.

This is also true of his most explicitly political films, *Our Home and Native Land* (1992) and *Totem: The Return of the G'psgolox Pole* (2003). On the surface these are both straightforward if slightly complicated narratives about

political negotiations: Ovide Mercredi's attempts to be taken seriously during the Charlestown constitutional talks, and the attempts of the Haisla nation to get the Swedish government to return a pole taken from British Columbia in 1929, respectively. But Cardinal doesn't let himself get bogged down by the details of this political wrangling; there are crucial moments in both films that evoke some of the themes that we see in his earlier work. *Our Home and Native Land* has an utterly riveting sequence where Mercredi's party goes to Quebec's Assemblée nationale to give testimony but is barred by security personnel who don't want them to enter with their traditional drums (my co-Cardinal-interviewer William Beard called that "a wonderful 'documentary moment'"<sup>20</sup>); it speaks volumes about the inability of Canada's founding peoples to communicate with one another. But there are also moments of down time with Mercredi, where he doesn't say much but radiates a sense of exhaustion; it's an emotion that, because it is so clearly rendered, also speaks volumes. Similarly, Cardinal does justice to the complexity of the negotiations between Kitamaat Village and Stockholm, in *Totem: The Return of the G'psgolox Pole*, by making the viewer pay attention to the details of political dealings. But two sequences which are not explicitly political are just as key to the film's overall meaning. At one point, the artist in charge of creating a replica pole to appease the Swedish museum authorities meets with a group of kids on a tour through the facility where he is working; he seems tired and is not entirely enthusiastic with the kids, but he radiates a kind of seriousness of purpose that makes the experience resonant. Another sequence, on the other side of the Atlantic, features a ceremony that includes a local Sami man, there to show a kind of pan-indigenous solidarity with the

Haisla. It's not tough to think of that guy as a stand-in for Cardinal himself; he is clearly part of the proceedings and he knows well the cultural struggle of which this is a part. But it is not his struggle. He is a *témoin*.

## Conclusion

Much political rhetoric spewed out by the impossibly right-wing reactionaries that defined Alberta's politics in the 1990s and 2000s gave the impression that the province was utterly out of touch with the rest of Canada, either Francophone or Anglophone. Filmmaking in that province, however, tells a very different story. Cinema in Alberta has been a kind of mirror of cinema in Canada. Canadian cinema's struggles – to build a feature film industry, to support ambitious independent *auteurs*, to revitalise a documentary tradition along a new set of ethical and political assumptions – are also the defining struggles of Alberta's cinema, much more so, I daresay, than in any other part of the Prairies or in the Maritimes. That broad discussions of Canadian cinema only rarely take Alberta into account really is a shame – but then again, discussions of international film practices rarely take into account the cinemas of Canada. Alberta is perhaps to Canada what Canada is to the world: a prosperous region, envied by many for its wealth, but one that remains culturally marginal, if not entirely irrelevant. And just as scholars from America and Europe should pay more attention to what is happening in this country, Canadian film scholars should take a closer look at cinema in the Kingdom of Oil and Beef, for it can explain a lot about the diverse but always embattled filmmaking practices north of the 49<sup>th</sup>.

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Bill Marsden, *Big Screen Country: Making Movies in Alberta* (Edmonton: Fifth House, 2004), p.83. Like Fil Fraser's *Alberta Camelot* (see n14), this is a highly informed and highly personal memoir that is quite valuable for people wanting an inside look at arts policy in Alberta.

<sup>2</sup> Linda Kupecek, "Alberta Onscreen: Why Fight for an Indigenous Film Industry?," *Alberta Views*, January/February 2000, pp.16-20.

<sup>3</sup> Denyse Therrien, "Petit à petit, le cinéma des prairies fait son nid," in Pierre Véronneau, éd., *À la recherche d'une identité: renaissance du cinéma d'auteur canadien-anglais* (Montréal: Cinémathèque Québécoise, 1991), p.146. My translation: "But the province never did renounce its dream of putting in place a service industry meant to attract the Americans"

<sup>4</sup> Laura Lind, "Cautionary Tale of Two Provinces," *Eye Weekly* (Toronto), 21 August 1997. Available at [http://www.eyenet.net/eye/issue/issue\\_08.21.97/film/reellife21.html](http://www.eyenet.net/eye/issue/issue_08.21.97/film/reellife21.html) on 27 August 2004.

<sup>5</sup> Available at [http://www.albertafilm.ca/web/afc\\_faq.php](http://www.albertafilm.ca/web/afc_faq.php) on 27 August 2004.

<sup>6</sup> [http://www.cd.gov.ab.ca/all\\_about\\_us/commissions/arts/](http://www.cd.gov.ab.ca/all_about_us/commissions/arts/). For the three sections, click on "Film and Video." 20 September 2004

<sup>7</sup> See [http://www.albertafilm.ca/web/fdo\\_funding.php](http://www.albertafilm.ca/web/fdo_funding.php). 15 September 2005.

<sup>8</sup> Maria de Rosa, "Studio One: Of Storytellers and Stories," in William Beard and Jerry White, eds., *North of Everything: English-Canadian Cinema Since 1980* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2002), pp. 330-333.

<sup>9</sup> de Rosa, p.331.

<sup>10</sup> D.B. Jones, "Brave New Film Board," in *North of Everything*, pp.19-20.

<sup>11</sup> de Rosa, p.336.

<sup>12</sup> Testimony to the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, 28 May 1996. Available at [http://www.parl.gc.ca/committees/352/heri/evidence/12\\_96-05-28/heri12\\_blk101.html](http://www.parl.gc.ca/committees/352/heri/evidence/12_96-05-28/heri12_blk101.html) on 27 August 2004.

<sup>13</sup> Therrien, p.143-4. My translation: "Alberta, apart from Anne Wheeler, doesn't have much of a profile in the world of feature filmmaking. It's no accident that the Banff Festival celebrates TV above film production. Salvation comes via the small screen. Prairie filmmakers had long hung on to the short film and documentary before moving on to feature-length fiction films and returned to these forms quite often. Discouraged by the indifference of the political officials responsible for culture – in Saskatchewan more than others, you could say – a number of filmmakers exiled themselves to Ontario or British Columbia."

<sup>14</sup> For the case that the Peter Lougheed years (1971-85) were a kind of Golden Age for the province's arts community, see Fil Fraser's *Alberta's*

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*Camelot: Culture and Arts in the Loughheed Years* (Edmonton: Lone Pine, 2003). Fraser is a prominent Albertan producer and media professional whose films as producer include *Why Shoot the Teacher* (1977) and *The Hounds of Notre Dame* (1980).

<sup>15</sup> Gilles Hebert, "Grandir dans les Prairies," in Sylvain Garel et André Paquet, eds., *Les Cinémas du Canada* (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 1992), p.164. My translation: "Thanks to the cooperation of the actors and crew and despite the attitude of those who controlled the means of production, Joe Vismeg had accomplished the impossible: a polished film that that was worthy of study for what it was, and not just for the processes which allowed its production."

<sup>16</sup> Pierre Véronneau, "Le Québec : De la fiction, Dirent-ils. Des origines à 1960," in *Les Cinémas du Canada*, p.45. My translation: "It's necessary to emphasise that a lot of the below-the-line crew moved on to work either at the TV stations or the private companies that made series for them."

<sup>17</sup> Brenda Longfellow, "Counter-Narratives, Class Politics and Metropolitan Dystopias: Representations of Globalization in *Maelström*, *waydowntown* and *La Moitié gauche du frigo*," *Canadian Journal of Film Studies / Revue canadienne d'études cinématographiques* 13:1 (2004), p.79.

<sup>18</sup> William Beard and Jerry White, "Cowboy Filmmaking: An Interview with Gil Cardinal," in *North of Everything*, p.354.

<sup>19</sup> I asked Cardinal if he saw a link between *Foster Child* and *Tikinagan*, and he responded sceptically, saying "Yeah, but it wasn't conscious, it wasn't purposeful." I pressed the point a bit, but he never really seemed to buy it. See "Cowboy Filmmaking," pp.357-8.

<sup>20</sup> "Cowboy Filmmaking," p.351.





## APPENDIX

Top 10 Québec films at the box office as of December 2005.  
Source: Alex films

<b>1</b>	<b>Alliance</b>	<i>Séraphin*: un home et son péché</i>	<b>2002</b>	<b>\$9 299 833</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Alliance</b>	<i>La grande séduction</i>	<b>2003</b>	<b>\$8 424 617</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>Lions Gate</b>	<i>Les Boys</i>	<b>1997</b>	<b>\$6 953 123</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>Alliance</b>	<i>Les Invasions barbares</i>	<b>2003</b>	<b>\$6 598 670</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>Lions Gate</b>	<i>Les Boys II</i>	<b>1998</b>	<b>\$6 240 472</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>Christal</b>	<i>Les Boys III</i>	<b>2001</b>	<b>\$6 136 013</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>TVA Films</b>	<i>C.R.A.Z.Y.</i>	<b>2005</b>	<b>\$5 799 097</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>Vivafilm</b>	<i>Aurore</i>	<b>2005</b>	<b>\$5 309 785</b>
<b>9</b>	<b>Lions Gate</b>	<i>Elvis Gratton II: Miracle à Memphis</i>	<b>1999</b>	<b>\$4 303 452</b>
<b>10</b>	<b>Vivafilm</b>	<i>Horloge biologique</i>	<b>2005</b>	<b>\$4 210 080</b>

\* *Séraphin* is the 8<sup>th</sup> top-grossing film of all times in Québec just above *Star Wars I: The Phantom Menace* (2002).

All other Quebec films that have made over \$1 000 000.  
Source: Alex Films. \* Numbers provided by distributors

Malofilm	<i>Cruising Bar</i>	1989	3 400 000	*
Malofilm	<i>Le Déclin de l'empire américain</i>	1986	2 700 000	*
Equinoxe	<i>Mambo Italiano</i>	2003	2 696 549	
Alliance	<i>La Vie après l'amour</i>	2000	2 604 496	
Maxfilm	<i>Ding et Dong le film</i>	1990	2 400 000	*
Christal Films	<i>Nez rouge</i>	2003	2 299 032	
Alliance	<i>C't'à ton tour Laura Cadieux</i>	1998	2 238 344	
Alliance	<i>L'Odyssée d'Alice Tremblay</i>	2002	2 117 263	
France Film	<i>Deux femmes en or</i>	1970	2 100 000	*
Films Séville	<i>Nuit de noces</i>	2001	2 056 616	
Aska	<i>The Kid Brother</i>	1987	2 000 000	*
Ciné 360	<i>Les Plouffe</i>	1981	1 900 000	*
Maxfilm	<i>Jésus de Montréal</i>	1989	1 800 000	*
Cinéma Plus	<i>La Grenouille et la baleine</i>	1988	1 800 000	*
Alliance	<i>Sur le seuil</i>	2003	1 706 395	
Malofilm	<i>Louis 19 le roi des ondes</i>	1994	1 669 376	
C/FP	<i>L'Initiation</i>	1970	1 500 000	*

<b>Cinéma Plus</b>	<i>Bach et bottine</i>	<b>1986</b>	<b>1 400 000</b>	*
<b>Alliance</b>	<i>Laura Cadieux... La suite</i>	<b>1999</b>	<b>1 377 286</b>	
<b>Maxfilm</b>	<i>Un zoo la nuit</i>	<b>1987</b>	<b>1 300 000</b>	*
<b>TVA Int.</b>	<i>The Art of War</i>	<b>2000</b>	<b>1 299 356</b>	
<b>Alliance</b>	<i>La Florida</i>	<b>1993</b>	<b>1 260 877</b>	
<b>Christal Films</b>	<i>Moïse: L'affaire Roch Thériault</i>	<b>2002</b>	<b>1 252 726</b>	
<b>Christal Films</b>	<i>La Mystérieuse Mademoiselle C</i>	<b>2002</b>	<b>1 201 602</b>	
<b>La Fête</b>	<i>La Guerre des Toques</i>	<b>1984</b>	<b>1 200 000</b>	*
<b>Malofilm</b>	<i>Bonheur d'occasion</i>	<b>1983</b>	<b>1 200 000</b>	*
<b>Lions Gate</b>	<i>Valérie</i>	<b>1969</b>	<b>1 200 000</b>	*
<b>Lions Gate</b>	<i>L'Homme idéal</i>	<b>1996</b>	<b>1 129 967</b>	
<b>Alliance</b>	<i>Karmina 2</i>	<b>2001</b>	<b>1 081 667</b>	
<b>Allegro</b>	<i>Matusalem</i>	<b>1993</b>	<b>1 080 176</b>	
<b>Vivafilm</b>	<i>The Blue Butterfly / Le Papillon bleu</i>	<b>2004</b>	<b>1 071 594</b>	
<b>Alliance</b>	<i>Québec-Montréal</i>	<b>2002</b>	<b>1 060 353</b>	
<b>Astral</b>	<i>Liste noire</i>	<b>1995</b>	<b>1 047 241</b>	



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